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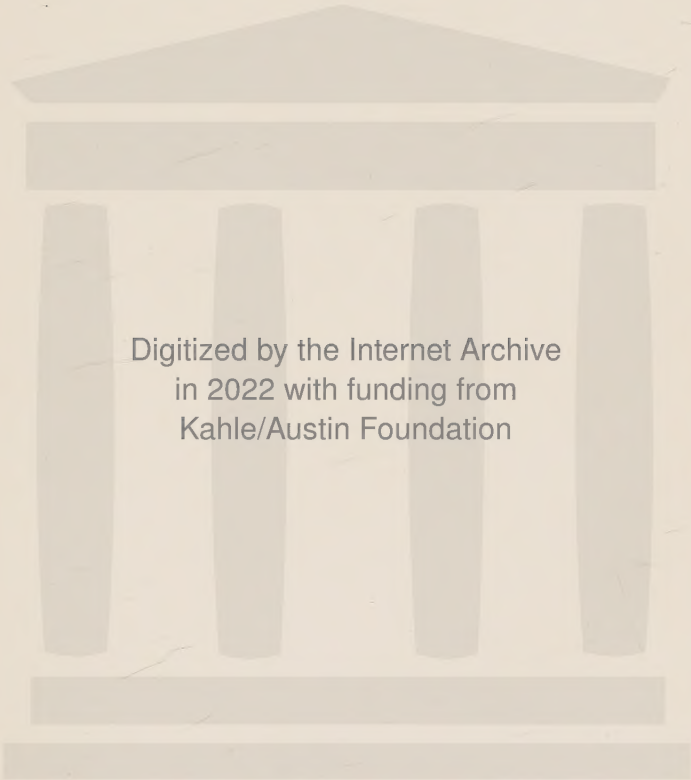
MARGOT ASQUITH

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

VOLUMES THREE AND FOUR

WITH TWENTY-THREE ILLUSTRATIONS
AND NUMEROUS REPRODUCTIONS OF
LETTERS AND DRAWINGS

"Les chiens aboyent, la caravane passe."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PRINCESS BIBESCO, WIFE OF THE RUMANIAN
MINISTER AT WASHINGTON

Oxford and Asquith, Margot Asquith, countess of

MARGOT ASQUITH

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

VOLUME FOUR

NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

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MARGOT ASQUITH
AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

MARGOT ASQUITH
AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

CHAPTER I

EVE OF THE GREAT WAR—ASQUITH WARNS EMPIRE OF WAR, JULY 29, 1914—VISIT TO THE GERMAN EMBASSY—KITCHENER—WAR DECLARED AUGUST 4

10 *Downing Street, July,* 1914.

IT is not my purpose to write a history of the war; or of any of the campaign, either in its successes or failures. These have been fully dealt with by most of the great Generals and many competent amateurs. But from my diaries and notes taken often on the same day I shall give a true and simple account of what I saw and heard from August the 4th, 1914, until we left Downing Street in December, 1916.

The London season of 1914 had been a disappointing one for me, and not an amusing one for Elizabeth, and as I was anxious that she should have a little fun I sent her alone on the 25th of

July to stay with Mrs. George Keppel, who had taken a house in Holland.

Alice Keppel is a woman of almost historical interest, not only from her friendship with King Edward, but from her happy personality, and her knowledge of society and of the men of the day. She is a plucky woman of fashion; human, adventurous, and gay, who in spite of doing what she liked all her life, has never made an enemy. Her native wit and wits cover a certain lack of culture, but her desire to please has never diminished her sincerity.

When we had to leave Downing Street without a roof over our heads in 1916—as our house in Cavendish Square was let to Lady Cunard—she put her own bedroom and sitting-room at my disposal and insisted upon living on an upper storey herself.

To be a Liberal in high society is rare: indeed I often wonder in what society they are to be found. I do not meet them among golfers, soldiers, sailors, or servants; nor have I seen much Liberalism in the Church, the Court, or the City; but Alice Keppel was born in Scotland and has remained a true Liberal.

King Edward asked me once if I had ever known a woman of kinder or sweeter nature than hers, and I could truthfully answer that I had not.

When Elizabeth went to Holland on the 25th (July) Foreign affairs were not causing uneasiness to any of the people that I had seen. But a feeling of apprehension made me telegraph to her a few days after her departure to tell her to return. She arrived on the 1st of August accompanied by Lord Castlerosse and other young men who had been summoned to join their regiments. She told me she would never have been allowed to travel had she not dined early and in a serge dress, and that no one in Holland felt the slightest anxiety over the European situation.

Some weeks after she had been with me, I received the following letter from Alice Keppel, which I have kept and shall always value.

"Margot dearest—you must get stronger; the time is coming when we shall all have to keep a stiff upper lip. Your heart is too large; you feel other people's sorrows as much as your own, but the grit you have always had is ever there. I think you are right when you say that there has been a lack of

feeling in the last few years. What struck me was the want of real gaiety about everything; but *au fond* I feel the British people are as sensible and straight-thinking as they ever were, and believe we shall come out of this better and stronger.* Elizabeth's visit has been a real joy; she is a delightful child, only 17! with such a quick bright brain and a heart of gold. We all—including servants—loved her, and her wish to help in every way in the house I found charming. When the war news grew black all she said was *'I must* go back or Mother will row over for me!' You have a darling girl, Margot, clever—and better than that—loving, unselfish and good.

"Your always affec.

"Alice K."

The apprehension I felt was shared by no one in London society, and as late as the 29th (July), when the Archbishop of Canterbury and Lord D'Abernon were lunching in Downing Street, they were amazed when I told them I had stopped my

* (I had mentioned in my letter of thanks to her the cruelties of the Suffragettes, and the indifference shown over the drowning of a friend of ours at a supper party on the Thames; also a general lack of reverence among the young intellectuals that had been growing up in England and wondered if there was not some better reason to account for the situation.)

sister Lucy going to paint in France, and had telegraphed for Elizabeth to return from Holland.

What had frightened me was that, on Monday the 27th, Sir Edward Grey announced in the House that he had made a proposal to Germany, France, and Italy, to hold a Conference with Great Britain, but that, although France and Italy had accepted, no reply had been received from Germany.

July 29th, 1914.

The strain of waiting for foreign telegrams with the fear of war haunting my brain had taken away all my vitality, and on Wednesday the 29th I went to rest before dinner earlier than usual; but I could not sleep. I lay awake listening to the hooting of horns, screams of trains, the cries of street traffic as if they had been muffled drums heard through thick muslin.

At 7.30 p.m. the door opened and Henry came into my bedroom. I saw at once by the gravity of his face that something had happened: he generally walks up and down when talking, but he stood quite still.

I sat up and we looked at each other.

"I have sent the precautionary telegram to every part of the Empire," he said, "informing all the Government Offices—Naval, Military, Trade and Foreign—that they must prepare for war. We have been considering this for the last two years at the Committee of Defence, and it has never been done before; for over an hour and a half we worked, and the last telegram was sent off at 3.30 this afternoon. We have arranged to see the representatives of the Press daily, so as to tell them what they may, and what they may not publish."

Deeply moved, and thrilled with excitement, I observed the emction in his face and said:

"Has it come to this!" At which he nodded without speaking, and after kissing me left the room.

Thursday, July 30*th,* 1914.

The next day I went to the Speaker's Gallery, full of apprehension.

The House of Commons seemed unfamiliar; yet how well I knew it! The smiling policeman and rapid lift; the courteous servants, noiseless doors; and the ugly, pretty, stupid, clever, West End ladies' faces. The suppressed chatter, dingy air,

Photo by Harris Agency

VISCOUNT GREY OF FALLODEN

frugal teas, and cheerless light of the Speaker's Gallery—all these I knew and loved, but they seemed changed for me that afternoon.

The position of affairs following on the Austrian note to Servia had developed with alarming rapidity. Mr. Bonar Law and Sir Edward Carson had seen my husband in the morning, and they had parted in complete agreement over the gravity of the situation.

It was impossible for Henry to move his Irish Amending Bill, which had been awaited with passionate excitement and was to have taken place that day.

I went to the Prime Minister's room on my arrival at the House, but, seeing Dillon and Redmond waiting outside his door, I remained in the passage.

Before going into the Gallery, Henry and I met for a moment alone, and I asked him if things were really so alarming. To which he replied:

"Yes, I'm afraid they are: our fellows don't all agree with me about the situation, but times are too serious for any personal consideration and whether X—— or Z—— do or do not resign matters little

to me, as long as Crewe and Grey are there: I don't intend to be caught napping."

I remember vaguely the frigid acknowledgments of some of the Ulster aristocracy and a withdrawal of skirts as I took my seat in the closely packed Gallery and watched my husband with throbbing pulses as he rose to his feet.

"I do not propose to make the motion which stands in my name," he said, "but by the indulgence of the House I should like to give the reason. We meet to-day under conditions of gravity which are almost unparalleled in the experience of every one of us. The issues of peace and war are hanging in the balance, and with them the risk of a catastrophe of which it is impossible to measure either the dimensions or the effects. In these circumstances it is of vital importance in the interests of the whole world that this country, which has no interest of its own directly at stake, should present a united front, and be able to speak and act with the authority of an undivided nation. If we were to proceed to-day with the first Order on the paper, we should inevitably, unless the Debate was conducted in an artificial tone, be involved in acute controversy in regard to domestic differences whose importance

to ourselves no one in any quarter of the House is disposed to disparage. I need not say more than that such a use of our time at such a moment might have injurious effects on the international situation. I have had the advantage of consultation with the Leader of the Opposition, who, I know, shares to the full the view which I have expressed. We therefore propose to put off for the present the consideration of the Second Reading of the Amending Bill—of course without prejudice to its future—in the hope that, by a postponement of the discussion, the patriotism of all parties will contribute what lies in our power, if not to avert, at least to circumscribe the calamities which threaten the world."

When he sat down there was a look of bewilderment amounting to awe upon every member's face. I got up to go, but the fashionable females crowded round me, pressing close and asking questions.

"Good Heavens! Margot!" they said, "what can this mean? Don't you realise the Irish will be fighting each other this very night? How fearfully dangerous! What does it mean?"

The Orange aristocracy, who had been engaged in strenuous preparations for their civil war and

had neither bowed nor spoken to me for months past, joined in the questioning. Looking at them without listening and answering as if in a dream, I said:

"We are on the verge of a European War."

. . . . . .

July 31*st*, 1914.

The next day, Friday the 31st, while I was breakfasting in bed, my husband came to see me. Having heard in a general way that things were going a little better, I looked anxiously at his face; but he said that he himself had given up all hope, and left the room.

After a long Cabinet he lunched at the Admiralty, and went to Buckingham Palace, where he remained for over an hour with the King.

He arrived late at the House, having been kept by an interview with business men in the City.

"They are the greatest ninnies I have ever had to tackle," he said, "I found them all in a state of funk, like old women chattering over tea in a Cathedral town."

He left me and hurried into the House to make the following statement:

"We have heard, not from St. Petersburg, but from Germany, that Russia has proclaimed a general mobilisation of her army and her fleet; and that, in consequence of this, martial law was to be proclaimed for Germany. We understand this to mean that mobilisation will follow in Germany, if the Russian mobilisation is general and is proceeded with. In these circumstances I should prefer not to answer any questions until Monday."

I could see that, in spite of Henry's marvellously calm temper and even spirits, he was deeply anxious.

There are certain sorts of men who in times of crisis wonder what they themselves can get out of the situation; and could I but write frankly of the conduct of, not only one or two of the Colleagues, but of other men in the early days of the war, it would be interesting, in view of the stories current at the time, and the nonsense that has been invented since. But the sorrows of those early days, and the tragic events which led up to the war are too fresh in my heart for me to chronicle gossip.

Conversation at dinner in Downing Street that night was difficult, and whatever topic was started was immediately dropped. When we had finished,

Henry went down to the Cabinet room and Sir Edward Grey joined us in the drawing-room. We sat and talked in a disjointed way, all sitting in a circle.

I watched Grey's handsome face and felt the healing freshness of his simple and convinced personality. He is a man who "thinks to scale," as Lord Moulton once said to me of Rufus Reading, and obliges one to reconstruct the meaning of the word Genius.

In the middle of our languid talk, messengers came in with piles of Foreign Office boxes and he jumped up and left the room.

Mr. Montagu (Financial Secretary to the Treasury) came in, and, after exchanging a few words, he seized me by the arm and said in a violent whisper:

"We ought to mobilise to-morrow and declare it! I wish X—— and Z—— could be crushed for ever! their influence is most pernicious: would you believe it they are all against any form of action!"

"How about McKenna?" I asked; to which he replied:

"Oh! he's splendid! Most loyal, and in perfect

agreement with the Prime Minister. X—— is mad not to see that we must mobilise at once!"

"Don't fret!" I said calmly, "neither X—— nor Z—— will have the smallest influence over Henry; his mind, alas! has been made up from the first and no one will be able to change it now."

August 1st, 1914.

On Saturday the 1st we read in the papers that Germany had declared war upon Russia.

The Beckendorffs * dined with us that night and we had a lively altercation. He said that it was not the Kaiser but his War Party that had prompted the Germans to make this move. I disagreed, as I could not but think that the Kaiser, being the big figure in Germany, was unlikely to be influenced by his son or by any person or Party. I added impulsively that I was glad that we could act together as a nation independent of every other country, which was not very tactful, but I could not help thinking how much I would have disliked any alliance with a country as misgoverned as Russia, and remembered in that connection the saying that "Britons never, *never* will be Slavs!"

We were still worried over the Irish question,

* Count Beckendorff, the late Russian Ambassador.

and after dinner I wrote a line to Mr. Redmond telling him that he had the opportunity of his life of setting an unforgettable example to the Carsonites if he would go to the House of Commons on the Monday and in a great speech offer all his soldiers to the Government; or, if he preferred it, write and offer them to the King. It appeared to me that it would be a dramatic thing to do at such a moment, and might strengthen the claim of Ireland upon the gratitude of the British people.

On Sunday morning, August the 2nd, he replied to me in the following letter:

"*Private.*

"18 WYNNSTAY GARDENS,
"KENSINGTON.

"DEAR MRS. ASQUITH,

"I received your letter late last night. I am very grateful to you for it. I hope to see the Prime Minister to-morrow before the House meets if only for a few moments, and I hope I *may be able* to follow your advice.

"With sincere sympathy,
"I am, Very truly yours,
"J. E. REDMOND.

"*Sunday,*
"*2nd Aug.*, 1914."

18, WYNNSTAY GARDENS,
KENSINGTON.

Dear Mr. Asquith
I received your letter late
last night. I am very
grateful to you for it.
I hope to see the Prime
Minister tomorrow before
the House meets if only for
a few moments & I hope I
may be able to follow your
advice. With sincere sympathy
I am very truly yr

Sunday
2 Aug
1914.

J. R. Redmond

After reading this I went with Elizabeth to the Communion Service at St. Paul's. It was a relief to see the children sitting as usual on the steps playing with the strutting pigeons, and as I walked out of the baking sunlight into the cool Cathedral my mind felt at rest.

I dropped Elizabeth at 10 Downing Street on my return and went across the Horse Guards to Carlton House Terrace to ask if I could see the Lichnowskys.*

It was the habit of the Germans to choose men of honour for their Ambassadors in London, and to appoint as first secretaries men versed in political intrigue capable of keeping the Kaiser informed of every facet of our domestic policy.

Prince Lichnowsky followed the footsteps of his predecessor, Count Metternich, and was a sincere and honest man. He had a pointed head, a peevish voice, and bad manners with servants. He combined in his personal appearance a look of race and a Goya picture. His wife was a handsome woman of talents and character, who from perversity, lack of vanity, and love of caprice, had allowed her figure to get fat; a condition that always preju-

* Prince Lichnowsky was the German Ambassador.

dices me. But in Princess Lichnowsky I found so much nature, affection and enterprise that, in spite of black socks, white boots and crazy tiaras, I could not but admire her. She detested the influence of the Prussian Court; and the Kaiser—to whom her husband had always been loyal—was a forbidden subject between them.

When the Prince first arrived in London, he told me that, on the occasion of his appointment as British Ambassador, he had said to the Kaiser that if he intended making trouble in England he had got hold of the wrong man. On hearing this, I asked if he thought there was much feeling against us in Germany; at which he assured me with perfect sincerity that the relations between the two countries were excellent; that there was a great deal of exaggeration in the talk, and that he himself had never observed any ill-feeling, but added with an innocent smile:

"Our Kaiser is a man of impulse."

That Sunday morning I found Princess Lichnowsky lying on a green sofa with a Dachshund by her side; her eyes starved and swollen from crying, and her husband, walking up and down the room, was wringing his hands. On seeing me he

caught me by the arm and said in a hoarse, high voice:

"Oh! say there is surely not going to be war!" (he pronounced war as if it rhymed with far). "Dear Mrs. Asquith, can *nothing* be done to prevent it!"

I sat down on the sofa and putting my arms round Mechtilde Lichnowsky we burst into tears. She got up and pointing out of the window to the sky and green trees said with impulse:

"To think that we should bring such sorrow on innocent happy people! Have I not always loathed the Kaiser and his brutes of friends! One thousand times I have said the same, and I will never cross his threshold again."

Prince Lichnowsky sat down beside us in great agitation:

"But I do not understand what has happened! What is it all about?" he asked.

To which I replied:

"I can only imagine the evil genius of your Kaiser . . ." at this the Prince interrupted me:

"He is ill-informed—impulsive, and must be *mad!* he never listens, or believes one word of what I say; he answers none of my telegrams."

I told him that Count Metternich had been treated in precisely the same manner; Mechtilde Lichnowsky adding with bitterness:

"Ah! that brutal hard war party of ours makes men fiends!"

I remained for a few moments doing what I could to console them but felt powerless, and when I said good-bye to the Ambassador tears were running down his cheeks.

Mr. Montagu dined with us that night. Though gloomy and depressed he was less excited than he had been on the previous Friday.

"Till last night," he said, "I had hoped against hope that we might have been able to keep out of this war, but my hopes have vanished. All the men I've seen feel like me except X——, who is intriguing with that scoundrel Z——. I asked the Attorney-General yesterday what was going to be said upon specie in the House to-morrow, and he answered:

" 'Don't worry! none of us can say at this moment what resignations the Prime Minister may or may not have in his hands at to-morrow's Cabinet.' "

Feeling profoundly indignant I thought of saying:

"All right! You can warn these men that nothing will affect my husband; he will form a Coalition with the other side and then they will be done for"; but, as there was no one whose judgment I particularly valued on the Opposition benches, I refrained, and contented myself by asking if he really thought X—— and Z—— would resign at the next day's Cabinet. We were interrupted by O—— coming into the room, and, not having seen him for some days and knowing that he knew the inner workings of X——'s mind, I asked him if it was really true that X—— was intriguing with the Pacifists, to which O—— replied:

"He has always loathed militarism, as you know, since the days of the Boer War, and has an inferior crowd round him, but, until he knows how much backing he will have in the country, I doubt if he will commit himself."

August 3rd, 1914.

After what Mr. Montague and others had told me I felt full of anxiety when I woke up on the Monday morning (the 3rd of August, 1914), and, thinking over the two Ministers most likely to re-

sign, I wondered what line Henry would take in the Cabinet.

It is always interesting to speculate on the motives that move men, and after considerable experience I have come to the conclusion that self-love or self-consciousness of some kind lies at the root of most resignations. At every stage in life men are to be found on the point of resigning. They start in the nursery, and continue in the servants' hall. We are all familiar with such phrases as:

"Oh! very well then, I shan't play!" or:

"In that case, ma'am, I had perhaps better go."

Unselfcentred people do not suffer from the same temptations: they are simple and disengaged, willing to help and ready to combine or stand aside. Threatening to resign is a mild form of blackmail equally common to both sexes.

We had men of every persuasion in our Government, Jews, Celts and Nonconformists. I have never understood why anyone should be proud of having either Jewish or Celtic blood in his veins. I have had, and still have, devoted friends among the Jews, but have often been painfully reminded of the saying, "A Jew is round your neck, at your feet, but never by your side"; Celtic blood is usually

accompanied by excited brains and a reckless temperament, and is always an excuse for exaggeration. When not whining or wheedling, the Celt is usually in a state of bluff or funk, and can always wind himself up to the kind of rhetoric that no housemaid can resist.

Nor can I say that the Nonconformist conscience has never disappointed me. At one time it was the backbone of this country, nobly presented as it has always been by the *Manchester Guardian;* but the Government policy in Ireland of an Eye for an Eye, or two teeth for one, dignified by the name of "Official Reprisals," stirred little indignation in the breasts of the Nonconformists or their Press; and the men I know who claim to have it to-day are maidenly, mulish and dusty.

There has been much misrepresentation about our Party entering into the war; nor can I tell the whole truth about it, but there are a few general observations which I can make here as appropriately as in any other part of this volume.

The Liberal Party has always hated Force, and love of Peace is what their opponents most dislike in them.

It is not easy for any Prime Minister to commit

Winston S. Churchill

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE WINSTON CHURCHILL

his Party to a war on foreign soil with an unknown foe, but it was lucky for this country that the Liberals were in power in 1914, as men might have been suspicious of acquiescing in such a terrible decision at the dictation of a Jingo Government.

War being, as John Hay said, "The most Futile and Ferocious of all human follies," no one can be blamed for hesitating to enter into it. But as so much political capital has been made out of the winning of the Great War it is only fair that people should know what actually happened. If any of the myths are still believed, I am in a position to dispel them, and I can only say that, despite the wavering of some of the Colleagues, neither Sir Edward Grey, Mr. Herbert Samuel, Mr. Runciman, Mr. McKenna, or Lord Crewe showed the smallest hesitation, and my husband made up his mind from the first day that we were bound in honour to fight. His faith was as great as the fears of a few of his Colleagues were shallow, and his heart was fixed.

In Proverbs xxix, verse 18, it says: "Where there is no vision the people perish," and I have sometimes wondered what would have happened if Henry had not sent the Precautionary telegrams

as early as the 29th of July, 1914, and followed them by speeches which inspired the whole British Empire.

What was the position of our Army in the year 1914? Thanks to Lord Haldane, Mr. Balfour, Sir Maurice Hankey and my husband we had an Expeditionary Force not large enough to fight half Europe—because no minister would remain in power for a week who attempted to keep an army for such event—but more perfectly trained and equipped than any body of men that ever left our shores. And they could have been backed by an even larger army had the Territorials been made use of, but Lord Kitchener did not care for other men's schemes and had not been long enough in this country to know what had been happening. He was a lovable man of great ability, but he had a moderate understanding.

A good deal that is dull and inaccurate has been published about him, but, whether from too much or too little admiration, the Kitchener that I knew has not been truly presented to the world.

In spite of a striking appearance his frank desert eye was misleading. A fine figure of commanding height, added to an address both autocratic and

19th August
1914

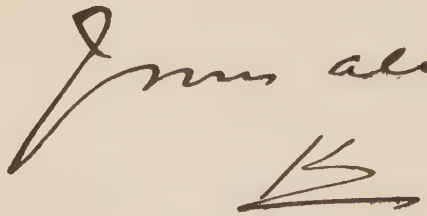
WAR OFFICE,
WHITEHALL,
S.W.

Dear Mr. Asquith

I will look into
what has been done
about Surgeons
I know Sir W Cheyne
& will consult him
I hope all will
go well & trust we

I shall not. would-
many of them
—
Hard work this!

Yours always



abrupt, conveyed to strangers the not altogether true impression that Lord Kitchener was a man of high moral courage and inexorable will. Be this as it may, no one who dominated the public mind and captured the private services of as many good men in the manner he did could be other than remarkable; and, apart from being a recruiting agent of incalculable value, whose steadfast stare was seen on every hoarding, Lord Kitchener was a man of genius.

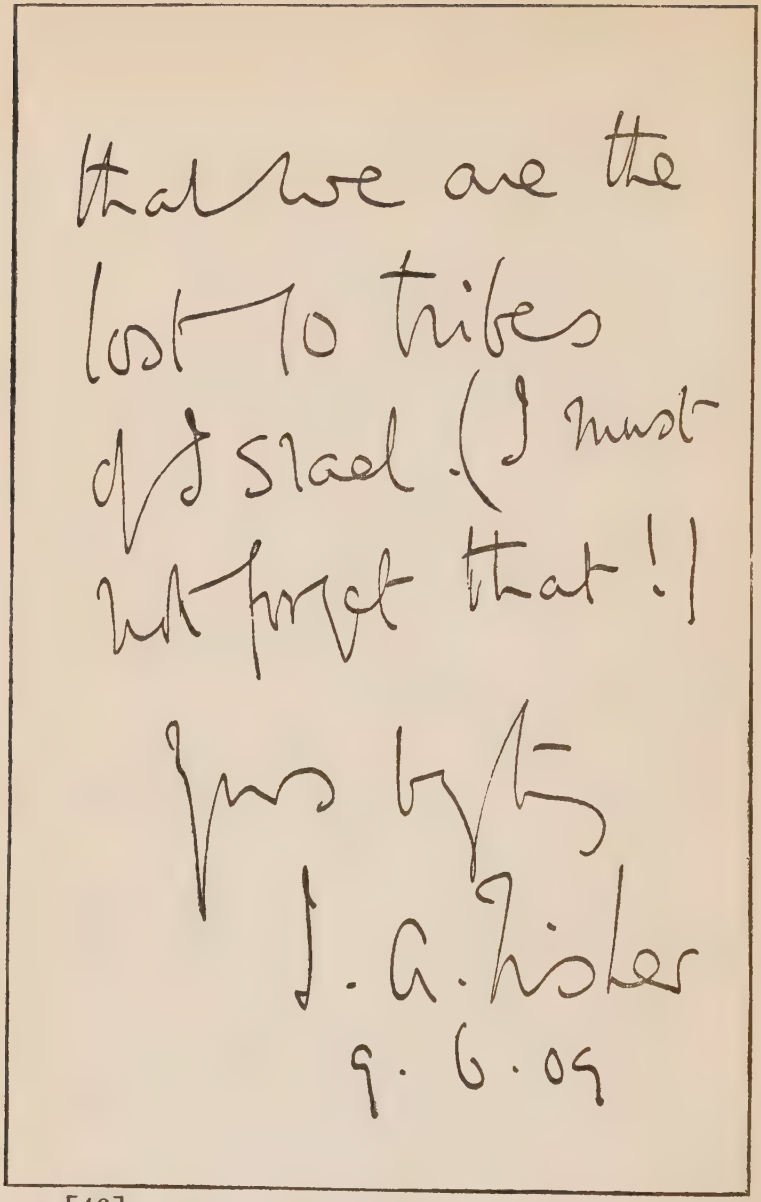
When he was appointed to the War Office in 1914, I was one of the few people who regretted it. I had known him from girlhood, and, while recognising his charm, was aware of his limitations. In spite of warnings from my husband and Mr. McKenna, who was then Home Secretary, he undertook at the outbreak of war more than one man could easily accomplish, and he had neither the temperament nor training for team work.

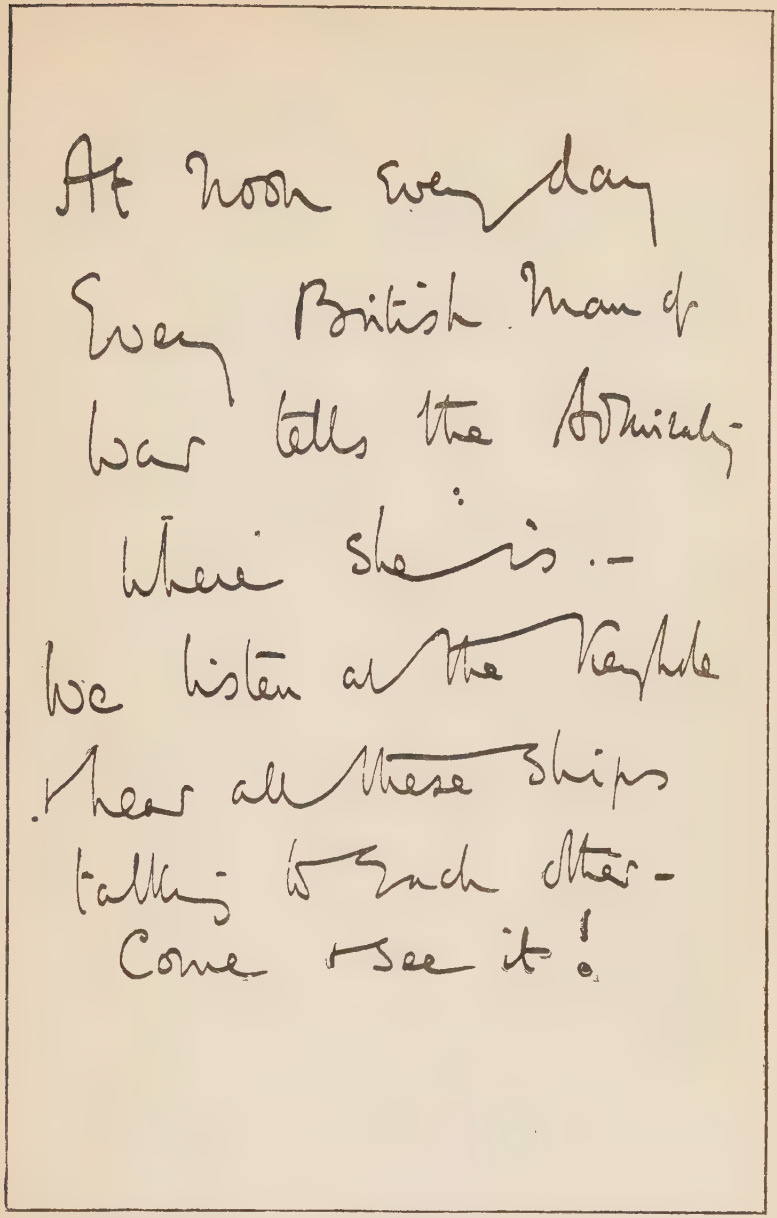
His life had been largely spent among coloured races who, when not overpowered, were generally outwitted by him, and being a natural diplomatist he was inclined to suspect his fellow-men.

With the exception of my husband, for whom he had an affection amounting to reverence, Lord

Dear Mr. Asquith
I will call for you at
10 Downing Street at
10.50 on Friday -
I hope the Prime Minister
will come also - He
will like to see the
listeners the Admiralty
listening

at the keyhole
also to see the
942 German.
Merchant ships
& how we sank
them up! and
then the proof


that we are the
lost 10 tribes
of Israel. (I must
not forget that!)
Yours truly
J. A. Fisher
9. 6. 09


At noon every day
Every British man of
war tells the Admiralty
where she is.—
We listen at the keyhole
& hear all these ships
talking to each other—
Come & see it!

"POSTSCRIPT TO A LETTER TO ME FROM LORD FISHER ASKING ME TO GO AND SEE THE WIRELESS WORKING AT THE ADMIRALTY IN 1914"

Kitchener could not get on with his colleagues, but the myth cannot be sustained that he would have been more successful had he worked with a stronger Cabinet.

Who were the men he had to work with in the Great War? They are all alive, well known, and puzzle nobody.

Is Sir Edward Carson a man of evasive personality who ever shirked conflict? Is Mr. Balfour's mind muddled, or Mr. McKenna's mystical? Has Mr. Churchill a horror of big undertakings? and does Sir William Robertson lack resolution? Could anyone accuse Sir Edward Grey of vacillating conviction? or the late Lord Fisher of want of courage? Did Mr. Bonar Law fear the future? or the present Prime Minister intrigue against the High Command? Surely not: the truth is that the awe he inspired in the East he was unable to impress upon a Western Cabinet, and the real tragedy of Lord Kitchener was that none of his colleagues were afraid of him.

He belonged to an earlier generation, before self-determination had come into fashion, and being accustomed to subject races would never have recognised the legitimate desire for independence

either in Ireland, Egypt or India, and he opened his career with two incalculable blunders: he ignored the Territorial Force, and muddled the Irish.

Great Britain has always held the theory that Freedom is the heritage of man and not to be granted or withheld according to this might, but this has never been put into practice in Ireland and we have doled out in unequal measure a special brand of Freedom for that country which has earned us its lasting suspicion.

There was a great opportunity at the outbreak of war of treating the Irish as citizens instead of as outlaws, but their desire to recruit in the same regiments and divisions, and take their priests with them did not appeal to Lord Kitchener.

I begged him with all the eloquence I could command when he came to tea with me one afternoon in Downing Street, to let the Irish have their priests, but he remained obdurate and their desire to fight was snubbed and never returned.

Upon one matter Lord Kitchener's judgment amounted to genius. No ordinary man would have foreseen that had we attempted to apply Conscription a day earlier than we did we should have checked the enthusiasm that brought masses of men

of their own free will into our army; that industrial troubles must have broken out all over the country, and that we should have transported sulky soldiers to France instead of men inspired by a great faith. In this he showed moral imagination of a rare order. He was also perfectly straight over the munition controversy, showing character and independence when the Press and the gossips started their campaign in the country to get rid of him and my husband.

So much nonsense has been written and believed over the shell controversy that it would be ploughing the sands—to quote an expression of my husband's—to re-open it; the prejudiced would not be converted, and all the men who count know the truth to-day. I will only say that shells cannot be produced by a wave of the wand or any amount of commands, and that the same complaint was being raised by every army in Europe.

In this connection I will repeat what Lord French said to me, on Friday, July the 2nd, 1915, after the formation of the first Coalition.

"You must not be depressed, Mrs. Asquith," Sir John French said to me, "all armies are in want

of munitions. We found a letter on a dead German officer, written to his wife, in which he says, 'we are doing no good in this line; we are infernally badly led and have not enough munitions.' "

At the outbreak of war in August, 1914, a contract was signed with America for twenty-nine million rounds of ammunition—a bold order considering not only people in high society, but every General and Admiral we saw thought the war would be over in a few months—but the indecision at Headquarters in France as to the kind of shell they most wanted, and the delay in carrying out the orders in America, made the position of both the factories and the Prime Minister almost unbearable.

It would have been easy for my husband to have told the public at the time of the many letters he had received both from Lord French and Lord Kitchener,* on the perfect adequacy of our daily increasing supply of shells, but he refused against all the entreaties of his friends throughout the whole intrigue of the Press and other persons to defend himself at the expense of the High Com-

* Secret.

(Ap. 1915)

14th

WAR OFFICE,
WHITEHALL,
S.W.

My dear Prime Minister

I have had a talk with French. He told me I could let you know that with the present supply of ammunition he will have as much as his troops will be able to use in the next

forces movement.

I think the next

move will be much

better than the last

with cooperation from

the French forces which

failed last time.

Yours very truly

Kitchener

mand. This earned him the warm private gratitude both of Lord Kitchener and Sir John French. But it was shown in an unequal degree by them in public, and I doubt if any man could recover his reputation after ascribing the early failures of the war to a dead enemy or a living friend.

Nothing that happened from August, 1914, till December, 1916, disproved the truth of the saying: *"La guerre est trop sérieuse pour la laisser aux militaires,"* and through the burden of the mistakes of both business men and the Generals was heavy at the time, and hurt us subsequently, my husband never regretted bearing it.

The tragedy of Lord Kitchener was in the manner of his death more than its occurrence. He died before the criticisms of his colleagues were known to the public—after he had had a great personal triumph in the House of Commons; and to us who knew and loved him he will always be an heroic figure.

. . . . . .

The two Ministers in the Cabinet whose motives for resigning were unimpeachable, and indeed to their credit, were Lord Morley and Mr. John Burns. I publish their letters:

A memorial of long, affectionate, active, and always affectionate friendship from

John Morley.

LORD MORLEY

"*August 4th,* 1914.

"My dear Asquith,

"Your letter shakes me terribly. It goes to my very core. In spite of temporary moments of difference, my feelings for you have been cordial, deep and close, from your earliest public days. The idea of severing these affectionate associations has been far the most poignant element in the stress of the last four days. But I cannot conceal from myself that we—I and the leading men of the Cabinet—do not mean the same thing in the foreign policy of the moment. To bind ourselves to France is at the same time to bind ourselves to Russia, and to whatever demands may be made by Russia or France. With this cardinal difference between us, how can I honourably or usefully sit in a cabinet day after day, discussing military and diplomatic details, in carrying forward a policy that I think a mistake? Again, I say divided counsels are a mistake.

"I am more distressed in making this reply to your generous and most moving appeal than I have ever been in writing any letter of all my life.

"Ever yours,

"Morley."

"*August 9th*, 1914.
"FLOWERMEAD,
"PRINCES ROAD,
"WIMBLEDON PARK,
"S. W.

"DEAR MRS. ASQUITH,

"The severance has been a sore affliction, but do be sure—if you care—that, so far as I am concerned, no wound is left, hardly a scratch. To-morrow we start for Skibo (the owner of which has for the moment joined the Jingo persuasion). There I find a little yacht, a library collection by Acton, the most charming hostess in the world (ask Rosebery), and relays of American company, who are as good as if one were abroad. I have a chance, too, of a week with the heads of the Scotch Universities! What say you to all that?

"Why do you tax me with a squeamish conscience? It was not conscience at all, but common sense. What use should I be in the Council of War, into which unhappy circumstances have transformed the Cabinet?

"I've run my course and kept the faith. That's enough.

"Give my cordial salutations to the Prime Min-

METROPOLITAN STATION, SOUTHFIELDS.

Aug. 9. 14.

FLOWERMEAD
PRINCES ROAD,
WIMBLEDON PARK,
S.W.

Dear Mrs. Asquith,

The servant has been a very attractive, but to be sure — if you care — that, so far as I am concerned, no wound is left, hardly a scratch.

To-morrow we start for Skye (the owner of which has for the moment joined the Irish persecution) There I find a little yacht, a library collected by Arthur, the most charming hostess

in the world (ask Rosebery)
and reps of American
Company, who are as good as of
one were abroad. I have a
character of a week with the
heads of the Scotch Universities
What say you to all that?

Why do you tease me with a
Squeamish conscience? It was
not conscience at all, but common
sense. What we shrink from

In the Comedy we, not whose
unhappy circumstances have
postponed the ~~Tragedy~~ Catastrophe?

I've seen her Caesar and Roscius
for Faith That's enough.

Give my cordial salutations to the
P. M. He has done me two or
three personal kindnesses tho' I thank
not even yet. I wish we
could have gone in together!
As for you, you Rascal, has
been unbearable and I shall be,
until my dreadful ~~days~~ days
Come to an end, always

Your affectionate friend, Hy

ister. He has done me two or three personal kindnesses that I shall never forget. I *wish* we could have gone on together.

"As for you, your kindness has been unbounded, and I shall be, until my dwindling days come to an end, always

"Your affectionate friend,

"MORLEY."

"LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOARD,
"WHITEHALL, S.W.,
"Aug. 17th, 1914.

"DEAR MRS. ASQUITH,

"Many thanks for your kindly letter, the sentiments of which I reciprocate.

"I am in the suburbs and disinclined, at least for the present, to give you any impressions of what transpired on August 4th (remember Quatre Septembre).

"What happened then is of less consequence now than what will happen next week. We are very busy here. I am engaged in hunting our relief works and have been successful in getting sufficient for at least 20,000 men for five months, capable of further extension as necessity compels.

"We are confronted with all the philanthropic mischief of the social butterflies and sentimental busybodies. Lady Bountiful competing with Lady Prodigal for the smiles of the poor and the bibulous cheers of the loafers in distributing other people's money at the cost of the character of all the poor.

"But we are sitting on their heads, as the cabman would say, and after a fortnight's firmness getting our own way with them.

"Our eight years' experience at L.G.B., the few but splendid people we got round us, and the excellent civil servants will pull us through this awful ordeal in London.

"I never worked harder in my life than during the past months, but there never was a soul more at ease nor a happier spirit than I am, with no resentment but only a noble pity for those who succumb to the diseased ambition of writing their diaries in *red* instead of black. The sadness, badness and madness of it all fills one with a merciful condolence rather than a glazing wrath, but the wrath will come.

"The sun here is warm, the common bright and green, the sheep are browsing in a field across the

way, and the temper and behaviour of the people in the streets superb.

"But in Belgium the serried ranks of soldiers are waiting to be mown down in swathes by the deadly scythe founded by angry statesmen, and wielded by the men of war for the errors of the diplomats who have blundered, and at the cost of the people who have trusted, and the millions who will suffer. By the way, it was almost worth having a war to get rid of the suffragettes.

"With all good wishes,

"Yours ever,

"JOHN BURNS."

I had no opportunity of asking my husband on the morning of the 3rd (August, 1914) about the resignations as I never saw him before I went to the House of Commons.

Our Foreign Minister was to make his historic speech, and when I arrived the House was crowded.

Sir Edward Grey rose and said:

* "Last week I stated that we were working for peace not only for this country, but to preserve the peace of Europe. To-day's events move so rapidly

* I have only had space for a short transcript of this great speech.

that it is exceedingly difficult to state with accuracy the actual state of affairs, but it is clear that the peace of Europe cannot be preserved.

"Before I proceed to state the position of His Majesty's Government, I would like to clear the ground so that the House may know exactly under what obligations the Government can be said to be in coming to a decision on the matter. First of all, let me say that we have consistently worked with a single mind, and all the earnestness in our power, to preserve peace. But we have failed because there has been little time, and a disposition—at any rate in some quarters—to force things to an issue, the result of which is that the policy of peace, as far as the Great Powers are concerned, is in danger. I do not want to dwell on that, or say where the blame seems to us to lie, because I would like the House to approach the crisis in which we now are from the point of view of British interests, British honour and British obligations, free from all passion. The French Fleet is now in the Mediterranean, and the Northern and Western coasts of France undefended. It has been concentrated there because of the confidence and friendship which has existed between our two countries. My

own feeling is that if a foreign fleet engaged in a war which France had not sought, and in which she had not been the aggressor, came down the English Channel and bombarded and battered the undefended coasts of France, we could not stand aside and see this going on practically within our sight, with folded arms!

"I want to look at the matter without sentiment, and from the point of view of British interests, and it is on that that I am going to justify what I say to the House. If we say nothing at this moment, what is France to do with her Fleet in the Mediterranean? If she leaves it there, with no statement from us, she leaves her Northern and Western coasts at the mercy of a German fleet coming down the Channel, to do as it pleases in a war which is a war of life and death between them. If we say nothing, it may be that the French Fleet is withdrawn from the Mediterranean. We are in the presence of a European conflagration; can anybody set limits to the consequences that may arise out of it? Let us assume that we stand aside in an attitude of neutrality, saying: 'No, we cannot undertake and engage to help either party in this conflict.' Let us suppose the French Fleet is with-

drawn from the Mediterranean, and let us assume that the consequences make it necessary at a sudden moment, in defence of vital British interests, we should go to war:

"Nobody can say that in the course of the next few weeks there is any particular trade route, the keeping open of which may not be vital to this country. We feel strongly that France was entitled to know—and to know at once! whether or not, in the event of attack upon her unprotected Northern and Western Coasts, she could depend upon British support. In these compelling circumstances, yesterday afternoon, I gave the French Ambassador the following statement:

" 'I am authorised to give an assurance that, if the German Fleet comes into the Channel or through the North Sea to undertake hostile operations against the French coasts, the British Fleet will give all the protecion in its power. This assurance is, of course, subject to the policy of His Majesty's Government receiving the support of Parliament, and must not be taken as binding His Majesty's Government to take any action until the above contingency of action by the German Fleet takes place.'

"I read that to the House, not as a declaration of war on our part, but as binding us to take aggressive action should that contingency arise.

"Things move hurriedly from hour to hour. French news comes in, which I cannot give in any formal way, but I understand that the German Government would be prepared, if we would pledge ourselves to neutrality, to agree that its fleet would not attack the Northern coast of France. I have only heard that shortly before I came to the House, but it is too narrow an engagement for us. And, Sir, there is the more serious consideration—the question of the neutrality of Belgium."

(We had read in the morning papers that German troops had marched into the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.)

"Before I reached the House I was informed that the following telegram had been received from the King of the Belgians by our King George:

" 'Remembering the numerous proofs of Your Majesty's friendship and that of your predecessors, and the friendly attitude of England in 1870, and the proof of friendship she has just given us again, I make a supreme appeal to the Diplomatic inter-

vention of Your Majesty's Government to safeguard the integrity of Belgium.'

"We have vital interests in the independence of Belgium. If she is compelled to submit to her neutrality being violated, the situation is clear. Even if by agreement she admitted the violation of her neutrality, she could only do so under duresse. The one desire of the Smaller States is that they should be left alone and independent. The one thing they fear is, I think, not so much that their integrity but that their independence should be interfered with. If, in this war which is before Europe, the neutrality of one of those countries is violated, and no action be taken to resent it, at the end of the war, whatsoever the integrity may be, the independence will be gone. It may be said, I suppose, that we might stand aside, husband our strength, and, whatever happened in the course of this war, at the end of it intervene with effect to put things right; but for us, with a powerful Fleet, which we believe able to protect our commerce, our shores, and our interests, we shall suffer but little more if we engage in war than if we stand aside.

"We are going to suffer terribly in either case. Foreign trade is going to stop, not because the

routes are closed, but because there is no trade at the other end. Continental nations with all their populations, energies, and wealth, engaged in a desperate struggle, cannot carry on the trade with us that they are carrying on in times of peace. I do not believe for a moment that at the end of this war, even if we stood aside, we should be in a position to use our force decisively to undo what had happened, or prevent the whole of the West of Europe falling under the domination of a single Power, and I am quite sure that our moral position would be such as to have lost us all respect.

"There is but one way in which we could make certain at the present moment of keeping outside this War, and that would be to issue a proclamation of unconditional neutrality. We cannot do that.

"The most awful responsibility is resting upon the Government in deciding what to advise. We have disclosed the issue and made clear to the House, I trust, that should the situation develop we will face it. How hard, how persistently, and how earnestly we strove for peace last week, the House will see from the papers that will be put before it; but that is over. If, as seems probable,

we are forced to take our stand upon the issues that I have put before the House, then I believe when the country realises what is at stake, and the magnitude of the impending dangers, we shall be supported throughout, not only by the House of Commons, but by the determination, the courage, and the endurance of the whole country."

Sir Edward Grey sat down in a hurricane of applause and the news of his statement instantly spread all over London.

When we returned to Downing Street the crowd was so great that extra police had to be brought from Scotland Yard to clear the way for our motor. I looked at the excited cheerers, and from the happy expression on their faces you might have supposed that they welcomed the war.

I have met with men who loved stamps, and stones, and snakes, but I could not imagine any man loving war.

Too exhausted to think I lay sleepless in bed.

Bursts of cheering broke like rockets in a silent sky, and I listened to snatches of "God Save the King" shouted in front of the Palace all through the night.

. . . . . .

Tuesday, August 4th, 1914.

Downing Street was full of anxious and excited people as we motored to the House of Commons the next day, August 4th: some stared, some cheered, and some lifted their hats in silence.

I sat breathless with my face glued to the grille of the gallery when my husband rose to announce that an ultimatum had been sent to Germany. He said:

"In conformity with the statement of policy made here by my right hon. friend, the Foreign Secretary, yesterday, a telegram was early this morning sent by him to our Ambassador in Berlin. It was to this effect:

" 'The King of the Belgians has made an appeal to His Majesty the King for diplomatic intervention on behalf of Belgium. His Majesty's Government are also informed that the German Government has delivered to the Belgian Government a Note proposing friendly neutrality entailing free passage through Belgian territory and promising to maintain the independence and integrity of the Kingdom and its possessions, at the conclusion of peace, threatening in case of refusal to treat Belgium as an enemy. We also understand that

Belgium has categorically refused this as a flagrant violation of the law of nations. His Majesty's Government are bound to protest against this violation of a Treaty to which Germany is a party in common with themselves, and must request an assurance that the demand made upon Belgium may not be proceeded with, and that her neutrality will be respected by Germany. You should ask for an immediate reply.'

"We received this morning from our Minister at Brussels the following telegram:

" 'German Minister has this morning addressed Note to the Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs stating that as Belgian Government have declined the well-intended proposals submitted to them by the Imperial Government, the latter will, deeply to their regret, be compelled to carry out, if necessary by force of arms, the measures considered indispensable in view of the French menaces.'

"Simultaneously—almost immediately afterwards—we received from the Belgian Legation here in London the following telegram:

" 'General staff announces that territory has been violated at Gemmenich (near Aix-la-Chapelle).'

"Subsequent information tends to show that the

German force has penetrated still further into Belgian territory. We also received this morning from the German Ambassador here the telegram sent to him by the German Foreign Secretary, and communicated by the Ambassador to us. It is in these terms:

" 'Please dispel any mistrust that may subsist on the part of the British Government with regard to our intentions by repeating most positively formal assurance that, even in the case of armed conflict with Belgium, Germany will under no pretence whatever annex Belgian territory. Sincerity of this declaration is borne out by the fact that we solemnly pledged our word to Holland strictly to respect her neutrality. It is obvious that we could not profitably annex Belgic territory without making, at the same time, territorial acquisitions at expense of Holland. Please impress upon Sir E. Grey that German Army could not be exposed to French attack across Belgium, which was planned according to absolutely unimpeachable information. Germany had consequently to disregard Belgic neutrality, it being for her a question of life or death to prevent French advance.' "

Henry paused after this and then said in a slow, loud voice:

"I have to add on behalf of His Majesty's Government: We cannot regard this as in any sense a satisfactory communication. We have, in reply to it, repeated the request we made last week to the German Government, that they should give us the same assurance in regard to Belgian neutrality as was given to us and to Belgium by France last week. We have asked that a reply to that request, and a satisfactory answer to the telegram of this morning—which I have read to the House—should be given before midnight."

I looked at the House, which was packed from gallery to floor while my husband was speaking, and through misty eyes the heads of the listening members appeared to me as if bowed in prayer.

"A satisfactory answer before midnight . . ."

These fateful and terrible words were greeted by wave upon wave of cheering, which continued and increased as Henry rose and walked slowly down the floor of the House.

Few understood why he went down to the Bar, and when he turned and faced the Speaker, excitement knew no bounds.

I quote from Hansard:

"The Prime Minister at the Bar acquainted the House that he had a message from His Majesty, signed by His Majesty's own hand, and he presented the same to the House, and it was read by Mr. Speaker (all the Members of the House being uncovered), and it is as followeth:

" 'GEORGE R.I.—The present state of public affairs in Europe constituting in the opinion of His Majesty a case of great emergency within the meaning of the Acts of Parliament in that behalf, His Majesty deems it proper to provide additional means for the Military Service, and therefore, in pursuance of these Acts, His Majesty has thought it right to communicate to the House of Commons that His Majesty is, by proclamation, about to order that the Army Reserve shall be called out on permanent service, that soldiers who would otherwise be entitled, in pursuance of the terms of their enlistment, to be transferred to the Reserve shall continue in Army Service for such period, not exceeding the period for which they might be required to serve if they were transferred to the Reserve

and called out for permanent service as to His Majesty may seem expedient, and that such directions as may seem necessary may be given for embodying the Territorial Force and for making such special arrangements as may be proper with regard to units or individuals whose services may be required in other than a military capacity.' "

When the Speaker had finished reading the King's message all the members poured out of the House, and I went down to the Prime Minister's room.

Henry looked grave and gave me John Morley's letter of resignation, saying:

"I shall miss him very much; he is one of the most distinguished men living."

For some time we did not speak. I left the window and stood behind his chair:

"So it is all up?" I said.

He answered without looking at me:

"Yes, it's all up."

I sat down beside him with a feeling of numbness in my limbs and absently watched through the half-open door the backs of moving men. A secre-

tary came in with Foreign Office Boxes, he put them down and went out of the room.

Henry sat at his writing-table leaning back with a pen in his hand. . . . What was he thinking of? . . . His sons? . . . My son was too young to fight; would they all have to fight? . . . I got up and leant my head against his: we could not speak for tears.

When I arrived in Downing Street I went to bed.

How *did* it . . . how *could* it have happened? What were we all like five days ago? We were talking about Ireland and civil war; civil war! People were angry but not serious; and now the sound of real war waved like wireless round our heads and the whole world was listening.

I looked at the children asleep after dinner before joining Henry in the Cabinet room. Lord Crewe and Sir Edward Grey were already there and we sat smoking cigarettes in silence; some went out, others came in; nothing was said.

The clock on the mantelpiece hammered out the hour, and when the last beat of midnight hammered it was as silent as dawn.

We were at War.

I left to go to bed, and, as I was pausing at the foot of the staircase, I saw Winston Churchill with a happy face striding towards the double doors of the Cabinet room.

CHAPTER II

SCENES IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS—GRAVE NEWS FROM FRANCE—KITCHENER THE AUTOCRAT—ORDERS TO SIR JOHN FRENCH—VISIT TO BELGIAN FRONT

10 *Downing Street, August 6th,* 1914.

ON the morning of the 6th of August my husband had it announced in the papers that Lord Kitchener had become Secretary of State for War, and in the afternoon I went to the House of Commons to hear him move his Motion for a vote of credit of £100,000,000. I will quote some of his speech.

"I do not propose to traverse the ground which was covered by my right hon. friend the Foreign Secretary. He stated the ground upon which with the utmost reluctance His Majesty's Government have been compelled to put this country in a state of war with what for many years and indeed in generations past has been a friendly Power. If I am asked what we are fighting for I reply in two

sentences. In the first place to fulfil a solemn international obligation, which no self-respecting man could possibly have repudiated. Secondly, we are fighting to vindicate the principle that, in these days, when force seems to be the dominant influence in the development of mankind, we are not to be crushed by the arbitrary will of an overmastering Power. I do not believe any nation ever entered into a great controversy with a clearer conscience. With a full conviction, not only of the wisdom and justice, but of the obligations which lay upon us to challenge this great issue, we are entering into the struggle. Let us now make sure that all the resources, not only of this United Kingdom, but of the vast Empire of which it is the centre, shall be thrown into the scale, and it is with that object that I am now about to ask this Committee to give the Government a Vote of Credit of £100,000,000. I am asking also in my character of Secretary of State for War—a position which I held until this morning—for a Supplementary Estimate for men for the Army. Glad as I should have been to continue the work of that Office, it would not be fair to the Army, or just to the country, that any Minister should divide his attention

between that department and another, still less that the First Minister of the Crown, who is ultimately responsible for the whole policy of the Cabinet, should give perfunctory attention to the affairs of our Army in a great war. I am glad to say that a distinguished soldier has at my request stepped into the breach, and I am certain he will have with him the complete confidence of all parties and all opinions.

"I am asking on his behalf for the Army power to increase the number of men of all ranks, in addition to the number already voted, by no less than 500,000. I am certain the Committee will not refuse its sanction, for we are encouraged to ask for it not only by our own sense of the gravity and the necessities of the case, but by the knowledge that India is prepared to send us certainly two divisions, and that every one of our self-governing Dominions spontaneously, and unasked, has already tendered every help they can afford to the Empire in a moment of need. The Mother Country must set the example, while she responds with gratitude and affection to those filial overtures from the outlying members of her family.

"Sir, I will say no more. This is not an occasion

for controversial discussion. In all that I have said I have not gone beyond the strict bounds of truth. It is not my purpose to inflame feeling, to indulge in rhetoric or to excite international animosities. The occasion is far too grave for that. We have a great duty to perform, a great trust to fulfil, and confidently we believe that Parliament and the country will enable us to do it."

When Henry resumed his seat the whole House roared with applause and everyone was moved. I found myself speculating on when he could have prepared any of this speech (of which I have given but a short transcript). I knew he had been working most of the night as I had found him writing at two that morning. He told me afterwards that he had neither written nor prepared a single line of it.

On leaving the House I met my dear old friend, Lord Chaplin, who asked me if he could drive me to 10 Downing Street.

"I am proud, my dear, to be seen with you," he said, with that fine courtesy with which we are all familiar. "If anyone had told me that any Prime Minister could have come to this House and asked for a vote of credit of a hundred million pounds

and got a unanimous vote, I should have said the thing was impossible. I'm not saying it because I am an old pal, but, my dear Mrs. Asquith, I think —and I am not the only one—that your husband is the most remarkable man living. He and Grey have started this war in a memorable way."

August 9th, 1914.

On the 9th the King's Message to the Army and Lord Kitchener's advice were published:—

"MESSAGE FROM THE KING.

"CROWN BLOCK.

"BUCKINGHAM PALACE.

"You are leaving home to fight for the safety and honour of my Empire.

"Belgium, whose country we are pledged to defend, has been attacked, and France is about to be invaded by the same powerful foe.

"I have implicit confidence in you, my soldiers. Duty is your watchword, and I know your duty will be nobly done.

"I shall follow your every movement with deepest interest and mark with eager satisfaction your

daily progress; indeed, your welfare will never be absent from my thoughts.

"I pray God to bless you and guard you and bring you back victorious.

"GEORGE, R.I.

"*9th August,* 1914."

"LORD KITCHENER'S ADVICE

"THE TRUE CHARACTER OF A BRITISH SOLDIER

"The following instructions have been issued by Lord Kitchener to every soldier in the Expeditionary Army, to be kept in his Active Service Pay Book:—

"You are ordered abroad as a soldier of the King to help our French comrades against the invasion of a common enemy. You have to perform a task which will need your courage, your energy, your patience. Remember that the honour of the British Army depends on your individual conduct.

"It will be your duty not only to set an example of discipline and perfect steadiness under fire, but also to maintain the most friendly relations with those whom you are helping in this struggle. The operations in which you are engaged will, for the

most part, take place in a friendly country, and you can do your own country no better service than in showing yourself in France and Belgium in the true character of a British soldier.

"Be invariably courteous, considerate and kind. Never do anything likely to injure or destroy property, and always look upon looting as a disgraceful act. You are sure to meet with a welcome and to be trusted; your conduct must justify that welcome and that trust.

"Your duty cannot be done unless your health is sound. So keep constantly on your guard against any excesses. In this new experience you may find temptations both in wine and women. You must entirely resist both temptations, and while treating all women with perfect courtesy, you should avoid any intimacy.

"Do your duty bravely,

"Fear God,

"Honour the King.

"KITCHENER,

"Field-Marshal."

I might have been reading an old Memoir of some great soldier had this appeared on any printed page

a week before, but in the short five days since the Declaration of War, one's mind had got attuned, and whatever you read or heard could not affect it.

In the course of that afternoon, I was summoned to Buckingham Palace to see the Queen; she asked me to sit with her upon a Committee to settle what needlework should be done to help our soldiers, and I went to our first meeting on the 10th.

August 10*th,* 1914.

A fine room was crowded with ladies of every shade of opinion, sitting round a large table; Peeresses and Commoners, journalists' wives and Ministers' wives, and an animated discussion took place on what form of needlework we should start all over the country. I suggested it would not be popular to do anything that would compete with the shops, and said I would undertake to make surgical shirts.

Lady Lansdowne sat on my right, and Princess Mary on my left, and next to her sat the Queen. Everyone was brave and cheerful but I felt horribly depressed, and after listening to a great many suggestions, some trivial, and some important, I

returned to Downing Street where I had an appointment to say good-bye to Sir John French.

I found him waiting for me on my arrival and we had a long and memorable conversation. I asked him to give me any trifle that would remind me to pray for him, and I gave him a small silver gilt saint which he put in his pocket.

I travelled north that night to join my little son on the Moray Firth. Before leaving for the train I talked to Henry in his dressing room.

I found him reading "Our Mutual Friend." He told me he was going to read all the Dickens novels, as they removed his thoughts if only for a short time from Colleagues and Allies, and we went on to discuss his Cabinet.

In reading my diary to-day, in which I record the whole of this conversation, I am struck by the insight he showed upon that occasion about the men who were working both for and against us, in and out of the Cabinet, and could almost wish he had been less patient with some of the Colleagues he criticised. When I alluded to the recognised brilliance of two of them, he said:

"I could do with less cleverness: and should feel no anxiety if I had a few more Crewes and

To Margot
from her devoted friend
Reading

LORD READING

Greys. In public politics as in private life, character is better than brains, and loyalty more valuable than either; but," he added, "I shall have to work with the material that has been given to me! Dictatorships generally end in disaster."

I received the following letter forwarded from 10 Downing Street, when I was in Scotland:

"94 LANCASTER GATE, W.
"*August* 10*th*, 1914.

"MY DEAR MRS. ASQUITH,

"I have cut the *A.D.C. General* badges off my horsecloth and enclose them. It is the sort of thing you said—in your great kindness of heart—you would like. I am not going to say 'Good-bye' but 'Au revoir.' Thank you a thousand times for your kind and affectionate friendship.

"Yours,
"J. D. P. FRENCH."

Henry wrote to me daily while I was in Scotland. The following are quotations from his letters:

"*August* 17*th*, 1914. The Turk threatens to give trouble in Egypt and elsewhere, and the Germans are doing all they can to get hold of him. Winston is quite prepared to send a swarm of flotillas into

the Dardanelles to torpedo the 'Goeben' if necessary. Three of our Divisions are now in their positions at the Front, south of Maubeuge, and the other two will soon be with them. French has arrived at his headquarters.

"*August* 18*th,* 1914. The curtain is lifted to-day and people begin to realise what an extraordinary thing has been done during the last ten days. The poor old War Office, which has been a by-word for inefficiency, has proved itself more than up-to-date: for which the credit is mainly due to Haldane and the Committee of Defence. The Navy, too, has been admirable: not a single torpedo has slipped through either end of the channel.

"I am disgusted with the optimism of the Press and other people, believing all the nonsense about great Belgian victories and the Germans already demoralised and starving or committing suicide. All that has gone on so far—except at Liège—is a mere affair of outposts, and it looks to-day as if the Germans were going to occupy Brussels. The splendid thing the Belgians have done is to stop them on their road and throw out the whole of their time-table. Our force is by this time for the

most part in its proper place. I met Jules Cambon at the French Embassy to-day. He says the Kaiser, who is *vaniteux et poseur,* was overborne by the militarists and Bismarckian reactionaries, also by jealousy of the Crown Prince. He has a poor opinion of Bethmann Hollweg *'un homme très mediocre—en même temps bourgeois et courtisan—combinaison mauvaise.'* He told Jagow at their last interview that the Germans would be beaten—conquered as Napoleon was, by *'les deux Puissances intangibles'*—England and Russia.

"19*th August,* 1914. Kitchener thinks the Germans are going in for a large enveloping movement which will enable them to have a dash at the French positions between Lille and Maubeuge. He is very good on these things, and predicted this a week ago, when all the French officers declared it was impossible. He is very useful in Council on his own and kindred topics and most pleasant to work with."

Not liking to be separated long from my husband I left Anthony and travelled from Scotland to London on the 23rd of August.

I will quote from my diary of the events which followed.

August 24th, 1914.

"On August 24th, Henry came into my room looking very grave: he read me Sir John French's telegram and added:

" 'Bad news, the Germans have taken Namur. We've been driven back with the French. Terrible fighting since Saturday. We shall have an awful list of casualties. I *cannot* understand how Namur *can* have fallen if it's as strongly fortified as we are told. The position now is very serious, I must go and see K., and then we have our Cabinet.'

"The news came as a thunderclap to me: it seemed terrible to think that the first time our fresh, wonderful troops were in battle they should have had to retreat. Henry told me K. had cursed and sworn when he read the telegram and that he (Henry) much feared the French had been outgeneralled and wondered if our Army had been cut off.

"General Sir John Cowans, who lunched with us, said:

" 'I expect we've lost about 6,000 men all told—if so it's very good.'

"Appalled by his statement I asked if this would be considered good, to which he replied:

" 'Ah! Mrs. Asquith, the losses in this war will be tremendous for everyone. I am afraid the French have been too dashing or wrong in their strategy.'

"Knowing from Headquarters that our Army had been forced to retreat we waited all the afternoon to hear whether our men had been cut off.

"After an interrupted dinner, for which we did not dress, Henry and all of us sat in his sitting-room upstairs like people in a Maeterlinck play, saying either trivial things or nothing at all. (Henry and I, Arthur Asquith, the Harcourts, my dear friend Ernley Blackwell,* Sir Eric Drummond and the other Secretaries.)

"Cabinet Minister after Cabinet Minister walked in unannounced, and with anxious faces asked if there had been any further telegrams.

"Eric Drummond, who had left us to make enquiries, returned:

" 'They say, Sir,' he said, 'a despatch has arrived and is being deciphered in the War Office.'

"On hearing this Henry left us and went down to the Cabinet room. I followed him and stood at the top of the stair watching anxious Ministers,

* Sir Ernley Blackwell (Home Office).

and groups of officials waiting and talking in the corridor, while Eric ran back to the War Office. I joined Henry, whom I found alone; I sat in silence while he ran through a mass of papers.

"Eric Drummond told us on his return that the deciphered message had gone to Lord Kitchener, but that no one knew where he was, or what was in the telegram. At this Henry looked furiously angry: the door opened and various officials came into the room.

"Everyone spoke at the same time:

" 'Why was a bed and bath put into the War Office if K. doesn't sleep there?'

" 'I hear he was dining with Arthur Balfour,' someone said, at which someone else exclaimed:

" 'I doubt if he or anyone else could keep Arthur up after 11 o'clock.'

"A voice of more authority suggested that as Lady Wantage had lent Kitchener her house we should telephone to him there; at which Eric Drummond went into the other room and took up the telephone, some of us following:

" 'Hullo!! . . . Hullo!!! . . . I am the Prime Minister's Secretary. Who are you? . . . Yes . . . yes . . . the butler? . . . all right . . . tell Lord

Kitchener the Prime Minister wants to see the message from General French At Once. Hullo!!! . . . Hullo!!!! *Do you hear?* . . . *At once.* . . . What??? . . . Oh!! Damn! he's not the butler, and he's gone away.'

"Henry was still alone and in a state of exasperation when I returned to him. He rang the bell and said:

" 'Tell them to find Lord Kitchener at once; this mustn't happen again—I must have the despatch *at once;* do you *hear?*'

"Messengers and secretaries went off in all directions, while we waited in silence for what seemed an eternity.

"The door opened at last and Sir William Tyrrell rushed in, hot and breathless, with the telegram:

" 'Loss of over 2,000 men. Fighting since Saturday the 22nd, but all in line again.'

"The communications were still open, and the British Army had not been cut off! Thank God!

"It was 4 a.m. when we went to bed."

[*End of Diary Quotation*]

. . . . . .

Motoring with Henry on the afternoon of the 27th, I saw on a street poster—"300,000 Germans

against our men," and asked him if this were possible:

"Yes," he said: "they are three to one, if not more, against our poor fellows."

On the next poster I read:

"Indians come to help;" and when I asked if this was true he said:

"It was decided at the Cabinet yesterday, although Lord Roberts * was not at all keen about it: our native troops that were going to Egypt will now land at Marseilles as we think we must have every man in France."

On our return from the motor drive I found every one furious with Kitchener. They told me that one of our officers had come back that morning from the front suffering from a slight wound and had asked to see Lord Kitchener. The latter enquired whether he had come from General French, and hearing that he had not, said:

"Then arrest him!"

* In connection with this, Lady Roberts wrote to the *Sunday Times* (where some of the account was published) casting a doubt on my accuracy, suggesting that it conveyed a wrong impression of her father's love for, and belief in, the Indian Army. I do not think my husband or any other man ever doubted the devotion Lord Roberts had for India or the Army. He may have been mistaken about Lord Roberts's views, but I can only quote what he said to me, and the above account of our conversation he has verified from personal notes taken at the time.

It was an interesting sidelight on K.'s methods, but as we had been fighting from the 22nd till the 27th of August, and knew none of the names of our dead or wounded, it seemed both autocratic and foolish not to get all possible information, and from anyone we could.

We spent the week-end of August the 30th at my brother Frank's place, Lympne, in Kent.

We had had no news from Sir John French and a telegram we received from the President of the French Republic filled us with apprehension; this was followed by a long message from Lord Kitchener of such a confidential character that on receiving it we motored up to London on Sunday night, arriving in Downing Street at two in the morning.

At the Cabinet meeting next day my husband took a momentous decision in which the honour of England was involved, and if this advice had been disregarded he would have resigned.

Lord Kitchener was sent on a secret mission to France to tell Sir John French that our army was not to move away from Paris, and to persuade him to take the offensive as soon as possible.

September 3rd, 1914.

On the 3rd of September, Henry came into my bedroom:

"Nothing can be more serious than our position," he said, "indeed the whole situation at the front. The French Government has left Paris and gone to Bordeaux."

On the 8th I copied this telegram from our Ambassador * in Paris, which Henry showed me for my Diary:

"*Sept. 8th,* 1914, Secret.

"BORDEAUX.

"French Minister at Bucharest has been informed secretly that German Kaiser has written to King of Roumania; that from report of German General, German troops will have crushed Franco-British Forces in 20 days—he will then leave 500,000 German troops in occupation of France and will turn his attention to Russia."

I will end this chapter by quoting an account out of my diary of the only visit I paid to the Front in the Great War.

* * * * * *

* Sir Francis Bertie.

December, 1914.

"Henry and I went to Hackwood to stay with Lord Curzon to meet the Queen of the Belgians and her children.

"After dinner when I told her I thought the war would certainly last over two years, she was amazed and I could see she did not think it would be half as long.

"She asked me to go and stay with her in Belgium and see the fighting Front.

December 10*th,* 1914.

"There was a handsome Scotchman staying in the house, Major Gordon, secretary to the Duke of Wellington, with whom I made friends and on hearing of her Majesty's invitation, he said he would accompany me; so on the 10th of December, 1914, we started off together.

"I spent an uncomfortable night at the Lord Warden, and at 7 a.m. the next day, Major Gordon and I crossed over to Dunkirk in the Admiralty ship, Princess Victoria. I was too sick to see anything on the journey; but the captain told me that floating mines and fear of German submarines ac-

counted for our serpentine route, and our arrival being delayed by over an hour.

"It was Arctic cold when we arrived, but I wore sensible clothes: leather breeches and coat, a jersey over my blouse, a short serge skirt, a Belgian soldier's black forage-cap and a spotted fur overcoat. All very ugly but business-like.

"We took untold time to pass through the locks into Dunkirk Harbour. There we were met by a private chauffeur and the best Benz motor I have ever driven in, both smooth and powerful. Our Belgian drove us at a shattering pace on sheer and slippery roads.

"Major Gordon was more than resourceful and kind: quite unfussy, and thinking of everything beforehand.

"We drove straight from the Harbour to Milly Sutherland's * Hospital.

"There among the wounded I saw Arab, Indian and Moor soldiers lying in silence side by side. The distant expression of their mysterious eyes filled me with a profound pity, nor could they speak any understandable language to their nurses or doctors.

"After leaving the Hospital we went on to the

* Lady Millicent Hawes.

Headquarters of the Belgian Army where we were met by General Tom Bridges, 'the heart and soul,' as we were told, of the Belgian Army and in many ways a remarkable man.

"He gave us our passwords and passports for the next two days. 'Antoine' from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m., and 'Cassel' from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.

La Panne, Belgium,
December, 1914.

"We had a repelling meal in a dirty restaurant at Furnes before arriving at King Albert's Headquarters.

"It was 4 o'clock and in drenching rain when we reached La Panne. The King's household received me with courtesy and cordiality in a brick and wooden house built on the sand dunes by the sea. The villa was like a lodging-house at Littlestone—pegs for hats and coats in a tiny hall, with a straight short wooden stair and no carpets. It was bald, and low, and could only put up seven people: two menservants, one housemaid, a cook and ourselves.

"Comtesse Caraman-Chimay, the Queen's lady-in-waiting, is a delightful woman with fine man-

ners, and a great deal of nature and kindness. The Master of the Horse, M. Davreux—a cavalry officer in the Household—helped the servants to bring my things upstairs into a hideous bedroom, where I was glad enough to retire.

"We messed in the kitchen. The only other sitting-room in the house was a warm, open-fired smoking-room, where we sat after dinner. I was relieved not to have to walk in the rain 200 yards to dine with the King on the night of my arrival, as I was too tired to move.

"We dined early in fur coats, skirts and shirts; and all went to bed at 9.15 after an interesting general conversation upon the war and various other topics.

"My bald bedroom had neither curtains, blinds, nor shutters, and I put on a jersey over my night-gown. On one side the windows looked on to a sort of sand railway, covered with trucks and scattered villas, and the other on to the sea. Telephone and telegraph wires connected all the villas together and glass doors opened out on to brick paths; the whole place was sunny but bleak, and exposed to every gale.

"Luckily for me it was a glorious day when I

woke; and I shall not easily forget the beauty of the beach in the early morning. I saw nothing but stretches of yellow sand, and shallow ice-white lines of flat waves, so far out that no tide looked as if it could ever bring them any closer.

"Detachments of mounted soldiers of every nationality and every colour were coming and going on the beach, and an occasional aeroplane floated like a gull upon the air. Troops of Moors (Goumiers, as they call them) rode past in twos and twos, mounted on white and grey arabs, tatooing odd instruments with long brown fingers. Though picturesque on the beach, they looked as if they might be ineffectual in battle.

"At 1.30 on December the 12th, the Belgian Commander accompanied me across the brick paths through the sand dunes to the King's villa. My coat was taken off by two footmen in black, and I was shown into the sitting-room, where I found a tall fair man studying a map, and leaning over a low mantelpiece. He turned round and shook hands, and we sat down and began to talk. I thought to myself:

" 'You are extraordinarily like your King,' but I have often observed that Court people take on the

look of their Kings and Queens, imitation being the sincerest form of flattery.

"It was not till he congratulated me on having a remarkable husband, and alluded in touching terms to Henry's speech on him and the sorrows of Belgium that I suspected who he was. I instantly got up and curtsied to the ground, at which he smiled rather sadly, and, the Queen interrupting us, we all went into the dining-room.

"We had an excellent lunch of soup, roast beef, potatoes, and a sweet flavoured with coffee.

"I found the King easy and delightful; both wise, uncomplaining, and real. He has no swagger, and is keen and interested in many things. I told him I had bought several photographs of him to sign for me to take back to England, but they all had dark hair. He said it was clever of the photographer to give him any hair at all, as he was getting balder daily, and felt that everything about him was both dark and bald.

"He told me, among other things, that the Germans had trained off to Germany all his wife's clothes and underclothes, and all his own wine, adding:

" 'As I drink nothing, this is no loss to me, but

Photo by Hoppé

MRS. ASQUITH

it is strange for any soldier to steal a woman's clothes.'

"After lunch M. Davreux, Major Gordon and I motored to the Belgian trenches and on to Pervyse Station. We passed a dead horse lying in a pool of blood and heard the first big guns I had ever heard in my life; the sound of which excited and moved me to the heart. Aeroplanes gathered like birds overhead in a pale and streaky sky.

"We passed a convoy of men with straggling winter trees upon their bent backs going to hide the artillery. For miles round the country was inundated with sea-water; and the roads, where they were not *pavé*, were swamps of deep and clinging mud. The fields were full of deep holes, and looked like solitaire boards. The houses had been smashed and gutted and were without inhabitants; only a few soldiers could be seen smoking or cooking in the deserted doorways. Every church was littered with bits of bombs, and *débris* of stained glass, twisted ribbons of molten lead, and broken arms of the outstretched Christ.

"Major Gordon had brought a wooden cross with him to put on the grave of the Duke of Richmond's son, and I had taken one out at the request

of Lord and Lady Lansdowne to put on their boy's grave at Ypres, where we ultimately arrived.

"The Ypres cemetery will haunt me for ever. No hospital of wounded or dying men could have given me a greater insight into the waste of War than that dripping, gaunt and crowded churchyard. There were broken bits of wood stuck in the grass at the head of hundreds of huddled graves, with English names scrawled upon them in pencil. Where the names had been washed off, forage caps were hanging, and they were all placed one against the other as closely as possible. I saw a Tommy digging, and said:

" 'Who is that grave for?' He answered without stopping or looking at me:

" 'For the next . . .'

"Two English officers, holding their caps in their hands, were standing talking by the side of an open grave, and single soldiers were dotted about all over the cemetery.

"Major Gordon, who had borrowed a spade, asked me if I would help him by holding the cross upright, which I was only too glad to do till we had finished.

"All the time I was standing in the high wet

grass I thought of the Lansdownes and my heart went out to them.

"Suddenly a fusillade of guns burst upon our ears. It seemed as if some of the shells might hit us at any moment, they were so near and loud. Aeroplanes circled over our heads, and every soldier in the cemetery put on his cap and rushed away.

"An excited Belgian officer, with a few other men, ran up to me and pointing to a high mound, said would I not like to see the German guns, as one could only die *once*.

"As Major Gordon had left me to go to a further cemetery, I was glad enough to accompany them.

"Frightfully excited and almost deafened by the Crack! Crack!! Crack!!! Boom!! Boom!!! I tore up to the top of the hill with the officer holding my elbow.

"Had it not been for a faint haze over the landscape I could have seen everything distinctly. Thin white lines of smoke, like poplars in a row, stood out against the horizon, and I saw the flash of every German gun. My companion said that if the shells had been coming our way they would have gone over our heads; the German troops, he explained, must have come on unknown to them in

the night, and he added he did not think that either the Belgians, the British, or the French knew at all what they were up to.

"A French officer, looking furious, arrived panting up the hill and coming up to me said I was to go down immediately and remain under the shelter of the Hospital walls. Two Belgian soldiers who had joined us, asked me if I was not afraid to stand in the open so close to the German guns. I said not more than they were, at which we all smiled and shrugged our shoulders; and the French officer took me down the hill to the Hospital quadrangle, where I waited for Major Gordon.

"The clatter of the guns was making every pane in every window shiver and rattle till I thought they must all break, and sitting in our motor, writing my diary, I felt how much I should have hated fighting.

"A French sentry after eyeing me for some time, came up and presented me with his stomach-belt of blue cashmere. I thanked him warmly and gave him six boxes of Woodbine cigarettes, of which I had brought an enormous quantity. A Belgian Tommy, on seeing this, took off his white belt and

presented it to me with a salute which moved me very much.

"I began to think Major Gordon must be killed, as he had been away for over an hour. The sun was high and when he returned his face was bathed in perspiration. He told me he had put the Duke of Richmond's cross on his son's grave in a cemetery so close to the German lines that he thought every moment would have been his last, and after munching a few biscuits, we started off on our journey south.

"On our way to Merville we stopped at Major Gordon's brother-in-law's house, a cottage at the side of the road. It was pitch dark and we had tea with him in the kitchen, lit by one dim oil lamp.

"We had not been at the table more than a few minutes when a loud sound, like the hissing of an engine, made the whole cottage rock and sway.

"I felt genuinely frightened and wondered what the children were doing at home.

"An aide-de-camp dashed out of the room and came back scarlet in the face.

" 'If you please, sir,' he said, saluting: 'four Jack Johnsons have dropped thirty yards from the door.'

"General Nicholson jumped up white as a sheet and said to his brother-in-law:

" 'Great God, what will the Prime Minister say? I've let you in, my dear Gordon! . . . but I assure you, Mrs. Asquith, we've not had a shell or a shot here for weeks past. . . .'

"I reassured him as to his fears of my personal safety and asked him why the Germans wasted ammunition on such a desolate, inundated spot, to which he replied:

" 'Pure accident! But let me tell you, if there had been no water, not a brick in this cottage would have remained above ground, and neither you nor I would have had an eye-lash left! . . . Now, Dopp, give us the tea.'

"After leaving our host we pursued our journey and arrived at Merville, where I was the only woman among 20 men who sat down to dinner that night with General Sir Henry Rawlinson.

"It is always a surprise to an amateur why Generals and Ministers have such large staffs, and I have often wondered if they are kept for ornament, companionship, or use; but expect it is an unconscious form of vanity. All the time my husband was Prime Minister he never took a secretary

away with him either at home or abroad, but in old days I have known idle and rich young men travel with a loader, a valet, a secretary, a coiffeur and a chiropodist.

"Sir Henry and I knew each other hunting in Leicestershire and he received us with cordial hospitality. He not only gave us an excellent dinner —which was very welcome as, except for tea and biscuits, we had had nothing to eat since the early morning—but he gave up his own bedroom and bath to me, an act of courtesy for which I shall ever be grateful.

"I was glad to observe how popular my chaperon, Major Gordon, was wherever we went—nor was I surprised, as a better looking, better hearted, more capable and devoted person I have seldom met.

"We left Merville on December the 14th, 1914, at 7.30 in the morning, and arrived at Havre that night. "On looking at the boisterous choppy sea I made up my mind that nothing would induce me to spend twelve hours upon it, so after a peaceful night we motored back to Boulogne.

"At 7 a.m. the next morning we left, and got back the same night to London."

[*End of Diary Quotation*]

As this book is not a history of the war, I do not propose to write chronologically of the campaign, but will end this chapter with a quotation from my diary written on the last day of 1914.

December 31*st,* 1914.

"Although this is the last day of the year 1914, will any of us have the heart to talk of a happy New one to-morrow. When I opened my Bible to-night my eye rested on this text:

" 'Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down with you having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.'—Rev. xii, 12.

"This is an accurate description of what is happening to-day in this frightful war, with its aeroplanes, submarines, poison gas, grave-digging bombs, and general massacre and mutilation. But are we sure that it is only for a short time? or that the devil was not among us before? No people have ever so far departed from the Spirit of Christ as the Germans of to-day, but we ourselves had been moving somewhat in the same direction.

"Before the war we had our Frightfulness.

"We observed tepid, passionless young people ex-

ercising fine intellects in a manner more impoverishing than enriching to their natures: artists indulging in meaningless portraiture of confused limbs; women qualifying for Political responsibility by blowing up gardens, burning down churches, and threatening the lives of innocent women and children in low letters—not only threatening—but attacking them with sticks, stones, axes and dog-whips. We saw old friends insulting and cutting each other over politics; great soldiers intriguing to put the Army against the Government; great lawyers defying the law; and finally, pleasure people watching a man they loved drown, while incapable of either feeling or showing mourning for him.

"When we curse the 'Frightfulness' of the Germans we had better remember our own.

"War will ever be an enigma in my spiritual contemplation; but if the same patience, self-surrender, devotion, fortitude, and faith ...uld inspire men in life as in Death, there would be no more wars.

"The devil is undoubtedly among us to-day, and we must not infer that because God is good He is good-natured."

[*End of Diary Quotation*]

CHAPTER III

INFLUENCE OF THE PRESS—MRS. ASQUITH SHUNNED AS PRO-GERMAN — THE COALITION — LLOYD GEORGE AND SHELLS—DUPLICITY OF SIR JOHN FRENCH—PORTRAIT OF LORD READING

I CANNOT avoid writing, however perfunctorily, of some of the events which led not only to the resignation of my husband, but to the downfall of a Party which had smashed the Unionists in 1906 by the biggest majority ever known, which had won three successive General Elections, and which had been led for a longer period than any in our political history by the same Prime Minister.

This is a matter of such delicacy that for obvious reasons I shall not always be able to give the names of those chiefly concerned, nor shall I deal in any great detail with the matter.

There is a common saying that public opinion is usually right, backed by the proverb, "There is no smoke without fire"; but judging by my own experience, I can only say I have found the re-

verse to be true: there is always a great deal of smoke and very little fire.

Since the days of Pilate, the populace shout for the wrong man and you need only observe the transitoriness of fashion or of fame to see how little public opinion is worthy of consideration.

It would almost seem as if there was a floating fabric of evil playing perpetually over crowds, instigating anonymous and threatening letters; starting rumours; casting doubts; spreading what appeals to the lowest instincts of the credulous and ill-informed, and scattering from a busy mint false coins to the People and the Press.

I do not think there was any particular dislike for Christ among the people who shouted, "Give us Barabbas!" and some of them adored Him; but if you listen closely you will hear men and women joining each other all through life saying: "Give us Barrabas!" and you will be fortunate if you meet even a dozen people in life who hold and express an independent view. It suits the average human being to believe the worst, and thinking on things of good report gives them no sort of pleasure.

Bacon says:

" 'Tis not the lie that passeth through the mind, but the lie that sinketh that doth the harm."

In times of great physical and moral strain, or intense mental excitement, trifles become portents.

In the year 1915 the recurring failures of our Offensive, and want of proper co-ordination in the General Staff, provoked adverse criticism of the conduct of the war. The silence so conspicuous in 1914 had disappeared, and the patience of the public was ebbing.

It was at this moment that the lie that sinketh was spread.

"Wait and see"—a phrase originally uttered as a threat by my husband in the House of Commons, was taken up by a group of influential newspapers, and quoted upon every occasion as meaning apathy and delay. It is not difficult to perceive the prejudice this created in the minds of men and women whose brothers, sons and lovers were being killed in a conflict that touched our shores; and it gave a great opening to ambitious men who fancied that if they were in the position of Prime Minister things would be very different.

In years of War the Press if it desires to inflame the rabble-rousers has powers which it possesses

at no other time, and in criticising the patriotism, one must make allowances for the disappointment of Correspondents who were not only severely censored at home, but were forbidden to go to the Front. The irritation this produced was shown by a stream of abuse, and a deliberate desire to alarm the public at the expense of the Prime Minister.

It is an easy matter to frighten people. By gazing at a chimney pot you can collect a crowd in a street; by shouting "Fire!" you can kill people in a theatre; and if twenty or thirty papers write daily that the War Office is incompetent, the Foreign Office misled, and the Prime Minister asleep, they will be believed.

A certain air of authority was given to this abuse, as these papers having received private information of cabinet decisions before the decisions could reach any of the Allies, were able to announce that they had forestalled the Prime Minister and to congratulate themselves on hastening up his "wait and see" methods. So persistently was this campaign pursued, that several donkeys wrote signed letters to the *Times* praising it for its God-like prescience. I also had my social and political enemies,

and will quote what I wrote in my diary at that time:

"The D——ss of W—— and others continue spreading amazing lies about me and mine: they would be grotesque if they were not so vile.

"Elizabeth is in turn engaged to a German Admiral, or a German General; Henry has shares in Krupps; I 'feed Prussian prisoners with every dainty and comestible,' and play lawn tennis with them at Donnington Hall—a place whose very whereabouts is unknown to me.

"These private fabrications are not only circulated but believed, and had it not been for my receiving £1,000 for a libel action which I took in the Law Courts against the *Globe* Newspaper, the whole of our thoughtful Press would have published them. As it is, they mutter incantations about the 'Hidden Hand,' 'Apathy in high places,' etc., and like Pilate, 'willing to content the people,' Barabbas is released.

"I am told by John Morley and other students of History, that no greater campaign of calumny was ever conducted against one man than that which has been, and is being, conducted against my husband to-day. When I point out with indig-

nation that someone in the cabinet is betraying secrets, I am counselled to keep calm. Henry is as indifferent to the Press as St. Paul's Cathedral is to midges, but I confess that I am not! and I only hope the man responsible for giving information to Lord N—— will be heavily punished: God may forgive him; I never can."

[*End of Diary Quotation*]

As Lord Kitchener, Sir Edward Grey and my husband were the most powerful men in the Government, they were the chief victims of this abuse. Had they been as sensitive to the papers as Lord Rosebery, Lord Derby, or Lord Curzon, some effort might have been made to stop the divulgence of Cabinet secrets, but they were harassed with work, and only thinking of how to keep the Allies together and win the war.

We should never have been told to love our neighbours in the Bible had it not been a matter of difficulty: and although it is probable that if we could have given more information and with greater rapidity of what was happening at the Front, we should have satisfied people at home, it was impossible to let the public into our confidence when

working with Allies as different from ourselves as the French, the Russians, and the Italians. Violent quarrels in what is called "the Silent Service," intrigue in the Army, and disloyalty at home, obliged us to form the Coalition of 1915.

Men's minds were distraught, their nerves shattered, and their hearts broken by the tragic events that were taking place close to our shores, rumours of which were received on the same day, and the patriotism and reserve shown at the outbreak of war were gradually evaporating.

A Coalition may suit other nations but it does not suit Great Britain. The Parliamentary groups which govern France and other countries do not lend themselves to stability, and we have lived to see the failure of trying to govern men either by Autocracy or Bureaucracy.

In England we have evolved for ourselves from long political experience the system of Party Government by a corporate conscience which we not only understand, but which has been the envy of the world. The esprit de corps which is essential in a Cabinet presents no attractions to a Coalition, and ours was conspicuously lacking in it.

THE PRIME MINISTER AND SIR JOHN FRENCH AT G.H.Q., FRANCE, 1914

10 *Downing Street, July,* 1915.

Intrigue of every kind arose, due to the impatience of the frightened, the credulity of the fools, and the ambition of our friends.

Some men and women not only like but live upon Gossip. With a smile of welcome they proffer you one hand while concealing a stiletto in the other, and without knowing it the whole tenor of their talk is bearing false witness against their neighbours. These are they who sin against the Holy Ghost.

My husband, although an excellent judge of men and events, despised suspicion, and abhorred intrigue.

I read the following sentence somewhere:

"Suspicions are like bats amongst birds, they ever fly by twilight"; and it was not until the 1st of July, 1915, that I realised there was a deliberate attempt being made by the Press and certain persons to entangle the Prime Minister in a mischievous personal controversy.

On the 1st of July, 1915, a friend of Mr. Lloyd George's and a member of Parliament moved a resolution in the House that it would be expedient that all powers exercised by the Ordnance Depart-

ment of the War Office—under the control of General von Donop—in respect of the supply of munitions of war should be transferred to the new Ministry of Munitions then under the command of Mr. Lloyd George.

In the course of a violent attack upon the Government he said that:

"By its scandalous neglect of the most elementary considerations of warfare and its innumerable blunders it had seriously endangered the security of the country"; and wound up a virulent speech with:

"The history of the Ordnance Department is failure in the past, chaos in the present and hopelessness for the future. We demand that the new Ministry should assume all the power of this Department in regard to the supply of munitions and that the Ordnance Department should be robbed of every vestige of its authority."

The *Times,* being the only paper to publish a verbatim report the next morning, must have been given that speech before it was delivered, and the author dined with Mr. Lloyd George on the night of the attack.

Private Members being commissioned to defame

the Prime Minister, in conjunction with a group of hostile papers, was not only a new form of propaganda in our political history, but if sufficiently indulged in would bring all Parliamentary Government to an end.

July 5th, 1914.

A few days later (on the 5th of July) Lord Haldane made a speech warmly defending General von Donop from the inaccurate and unjustifiable abuse which had been showered upon him. He observed that it is not in accordance with British ideas of fair play to attack a Civil Servant who from the nature of his position is unable to defend himself; and pointed out that the Committee appointed as recently as October to look into the matter of shells had not only gone thoroughly into the matter, but included Mr. Lloyd George himself, and ended by saying:

"Had the order for shells then given by the Government been carried out, we should have had a very large surplus to-day."

This speech nettled the pioneers and was promptly answered. On the 8th, Mr. Lloyd George issued a statement to the papers in which he said:—

"Lord Haldane's version of what took place some months ago at a Committee of the Cabinet on Arms is incomplete and in some material respects inaccurate. At the proper time it will be necessary to go more fully into the matter, though Mr. Lloyd George hopes that he will not be driven to do so at this stage. But he would like to point out that the very fact of this conflict of memory having arisen shows the unwisdom of these partial and unauthorised disclosures of the decisions of highly confidential Committees of the Cabinet."

Here Mr. Lloyd George was right. Nothing of a confidential nature should ever be disclosed, either in public or in private, and whoever flattered the Press by giving away Cabinet Secrets at that time showed personal treachery of a kind fortunately rare in British politics; but he was wrong about Lord Haldane's memory.

I wrote to congratulate Haldane on his courage, and in his answer, which I received the same day (the 8th of July, 1915), he ended:

"So long as I have breath in my body officers who are misrepresented in public and are unable to defend themselves shall not be attacked with impunity."

On the 10th he came to see me and said:

"X—— and Co. are out to smash the Prime Minister, but Grey and I intend to stand on each side of him to protect him from such baseness."

A few days before this Lord French had sent a message to ask if he could see me. We had not met since the formation of the Coalition, and as the whole cruel campaign about the shells had arisen from someone at his Headquarters falsifying the truth by supplying the Press with misleading information, I was not at all anxious to meet him; but it takes me longer than most people either to suspect or to drop old friends, so I gave way.

Confronted by my questions, Lord French blandly denied all knowledge of the shell affair, but he appeared dejected and confused, and after a painful interview we parted.

Haunted by his look of misery and knowing what he must be suffering over the war, I wrote him a letter to wish him "God-speed," and this is his answer:

"Headquarters,
"British Army,
"France,
"*July 13th,* 1915.

"My dear Mrs. Asquith,

"I am sending one line by F. Guest to thank you for the very kind letter I got from you before I left England the other day. It was so nice and kind of you to let me see you, and I loved having a talk with you although you gave me a terrible 'Damning!' We were delighted to have the Prime Minister with us again. Please write me a line when you have time.

"Yours always sincerely,
"J. D. P. French."

This was followed up by several letters of such gratitude and affection to my husband and myself, that although I was puzzled, my suspicions were allayed.

It needs a mean nature to think of yourself when events of such tragic importance were taking place all over the world, and none of us was allowed to know at the time what Henry felt about the daily attacks upon himself. Through all those silent

nights and waiting mornings, with the recurring news of failure, and the anxiety as to the fate of his own sons, he showed an evenness of mind and sweetness of nature rare even in the most courageous. (Lord Kitchener said in his farewell interview with the King: "I have never seen Asquith rattled: he is the best of the lot.")

My husband shook himself like a dog getting out of dirty water over the X—— episode, and the papers continued, adding to their personal abuse, glowing praises of Mr. Lloyd George. This was so noticeable that even the *Morning Post,* a paper that has never concealed its loathing of the name of "Asquith," wrote in the last week of July, 1915:

"There are certain political intrigues directed to the replacing of Mr. Asquith by some other politician, the origin and purpose of which are obscure; we will frankly confess that, while we are not numbered among the admirers of the Prime Minister, we would not think it any gain to see King Stork in the place of King Log."

In quoting this I do not mean to imply that Henry was popular with the Unionist Party, but—difficult as it is to believe to-day—nor was the present Prime Minister.

Col. Lockwood,* a genuine Conservative of the highest type, wrote in answer to a letter of mine:

"Did I not tell you how all would some day recognise how great a man your P.M. was? While I listened to his speech in the House of Commons the other day I wondered if some saw the light at last.

"Yours ever, dear kind friend,

"MARK LOCKWOOD."

10 *Downing Street, August 3rd,* 1915.

The night before the first anniversary of the war, the 3rd of August, 1915, Lord Kitchener, Mr. Bonar Law, Mr. Winston Churchill, my sister Lucy and Lord D'Abernon dined with me; my husband and Elizabeth were to arrive the next day from the country.

Having heard of the death of Billy Grenfell,† I felt like cancelling all engagements, but fearing this would inconvenience my guests, I went down to dinner with a heavy heart.

In less than six months Lord and Lady Desborough had lost their two sons; young men of 25

* Lord Lambourne.
† The Hon. William Grenfell.

and 28, who combined all that life can give of courage, brains and good feeling, and I could hardly think of them without tears.

I would like to write of these and others that I loved who were killed in the war; Charles Lister, John Manners, Edward Horner, George Vernon, Eustace Crawley and Rupert Brooke, but the list of the dead that I cared for, and the parents I mourned with would be too long to put in any single volume.

While discussing the Grenfell brothers with Lord Kitchener at dinner that night, I said with impulse that I thought faith should be rewarded in this world by more knowledge, and that I longed for one glimpse of God's purpose—if only a gleam of hope as to our sure immortality. The expression on Lord Kitchener's face was one of puzzled kindness, and he handed me the port. To hide my emotion he turned abruptly to the table and, changing the subject, said we had only ourselves to thank for the failures in the war.

"The Germans attack us and we wait to counter-attack them. This is madness;" he said: "You must do it at once, while your enemy is exhausted, or if you *can't,* you should reform your plans with de-

liberation and slowly; but to wait, and then counter-attack impulsively, is to court disaster."

Mr. Churchill asked him which he would rather have under his command, English, French or German troops: he said that after the English he thought the Germans were the best soldiers: Winston said he thought the French were superior; to this Lord Kitchener—who had fought in the Franco-Prussian War—demurred, but both he and the whole company were agreed that in attack the French Army had not a rival in the world.

We went on to discuss what form the Memorial Service for the anniversary of the war at St. Paul's Cathedral should take on the next day. Lord Kitchener said:—

"The clergy are the most conservative, tiresome, unimaginative men to deal with that I have ever come across; I suggested all sorts of things to them: proper hymns like 'Eternal Father Strong to Save,' and 'Onward Christian Soldiers,' but they would not listen to me: I want this service to be a great recruiting occasion. The Archbishop could, in a short sermon, stir up the whole congregation, which would be a far better way of doing things than all this intrigue about Conscription."

I was surprised to find that Lord Kitchener not only disliked intrigue but was averse to Conscription.

I am not going to write about the difficulties with the Colleagues and the Country over Conscription, but in this connection I would like to say that Mr. Walter Long,* although a strong Tory, showed us a loyalty all that time which neither my husband or I will ever forget.

August 4th, 1914.

The next day (August 4th) my husband, my sister Lucy, my son Anthony and I went to St. Paul's Cathedral. In spite of soldiers, sailors, Ministers, Ambassadors, the crowd and the King, it was a disappointing service, and a great occasion missed. "Rock of Ages" was taken at different paces by the choir and the congregation, the prayers were long, and the music meagre.

My thoughts scattered as I listened to the sermon, and I wondered if the ways of man were not as mysterious as those of God.

We were watching little States bargaining over land and begging for money. Labour quarrels and

* Lord Long, of Trowbridge.

employers' profits; an English-speaking nation "Too proud to fight"; and the only contribution of a great Church, the canonisation of Charles I— I thought of the Fighting and the Dead; of Julian and Billy Grenfell; of Lord Kitchener handing me the port; and came to the conclusion that if it is hard to believe in God, it is no easier to believe in man.

. . . . . .

Before I left London for Scotland in the late autumn of 1915, and after a painful political Session, I received a charming letter, dated August 20th, 1915, from Mr. Bonar Law in answer to one from me, in which I asked him if nothing could be done to prevent Cabinet secrets being published in the Press, which I said was not only doing my husband and the Cabinet incalculable mischief, but hampering the conduct of the war.

"I am strongly of opinion," he wrote, "that the *Times* should not be allowed to go on day by day discrediting the Government in a way which most certainly is damaging the country in the prosecution of the war. There was an opportunity of raising the question in the cabinet to-day and I pressed it as much as I could. It was decided that

Carson and the Lord Chancellor should look into the question, and I hope that it will be dealt with."

The matter, however, never was dealt with.

10 *Downing Street, July,* 1916.

On the 5th of July, I received a letter from Raymond Asquith,* written from outside the Ypres salient, that curious strategic position that—whether from British obstinacy or foreign pressure I do not know—our Army occupied at such tragic cost and for so long a time.

"*July 5th,* 1916.

"DEAREST MARGOT,

"I was delighted to get your excellent letter with its capital news that Puff has got his scholarship; he will enjoy Winchester much more than Summerfields. What you say of the snobbery of some soldiers is appallingly true! If you look at any list of honours, it's always the same story. The Dukes are proved to be the bravest men of all, and after them the Marquesses. We've been having stirring times these last months. We were rushed up in motor-buses in the middle of our rest as an

* Raymond Asquith, 3rd Grenadier Guards.

emergency measure to relieve the Canadians after their counter-attack at Hooge. We took over what was in effect a battlefield and an untidy one at that. Mined trenches, confluent craters, bodies and bits of bodies, woods turned into a wilderness of stubby blackened stumps and a stink of death and corruption which was supernaturally beastly. The Canadians fought extremely well and are brave and enterprising, but they are deficient in system and routine. No troops can be first rate unless they are punished for small faults and get their meals with regularity. The Canadians are frequently famished and never rebuked, whereas the Brigade of Guards are gorged and d——d the whole time. We stayed among the smells for a week.

"I had a narrow escape one night. I had taken a man with me to inspect the barbed wire in front of our trench and when we were 40 yards out we found ourselves suddenly illuminated by the glare of ½ dozen German rockets. We bobbed down behind a lump of earth and the next moment a bomb burst a yard away; I was spattered all over but not hurt.

"We have 10 more days to get through these

two lines before we can change our linen or take our boots off; sixteen days without undressing is excessive in my opinion, but I suppose P——— S——— knows best.

"Love to you and Father."

This was the last letter I ever had from him.

When the Parliament of 1916 broke up in summer, we went to a house at Bognor lent us for 6 weeks by a new and dear friend of ours, Sir Arthur Du Cros.

We had invited a mixed party for our last week-end; Lord Reading, Sir Ernest Cassel, his niece, Anna Jenkins, Lord Charles Montagu, Lord Basil Blackwood, Sir Arthur Du Cros, my cousin, Nan Tennant and Mr. Massingham of *The Nation*; but some of them threw us over, and as far as I can remember, Sir Ernest Cassel, his niece (my friend, Anna Jenkins) and Lord Reading, were our only guests.

Sir Ernest Cassel was a man of natural authority, who from humble beginnings became a financier of wealth and importance. He had no small talk and disliked gossip; he was dignified, autocratic

and wise; with a power of loving those he cared for which I find rare. In spite of the sufferings that our contemptible spy-hunters caused him during the War, no one was ever more loyal or generous to the country of his adoption.

He and I had many mutual friends, among them the present Viceroy of India.

Rufus Reading is one of the best fellows that ever lived. He has no trace of hardness, and though ambitious is never selfish. By race a Jew, he is British to the core, neither touchy, restless or suspicious, but combines wisdom with caution and has the laugh of an English schoolboy. What attracts me in him is his untireable capacity for simple enjoyment, his gravity and insight, and a critical faculty that never cuts. Although an admiring friend of the present Prime Minister, he has always been grateful for the affection and friendship my husband showed him over the Marconi incident, nor has he ever neglected to prove this gratitude. He has consulted Henry throughout his career and their friendship cannot lessen now.

After leaving Bognor we returned to the Wharf for the remainder of the holidays.

MR. ASQUITH AND HIS SON ANTHONY AT "THE WHARF"

The Wharf, September, 1916.

I will here quote from my diary.

"On Sunday, September the 17th, we were entertaining a week-end party, which included General and Florry Bridges, Lady Tree, Nan Tennant, Bogie Harris, Arnold Ward, and Sir John Cowans. While we were playing tennis in the afternoon my husband went for a drive with my cousin, Nan Tennant. He looked well, and had been delighted with his visit to the front and all he saw of the improvement in our organisation there: the tanks and the troops as well as the guns. Our Offensive for the time being was going amazingly well. The French were fighting magnificently, the House of Commons was shut, the Cabinet more united, and from what we heard on good authority the Germans more discouraged. Henry told us about Raymond, whom he had seen at Tricourt on the 6th (September, 1916).

"As it was my little son's last Sunday before going back to Winchester I told him he might run across from the Barn in his pyjamas after dinner and sit with us while the men were in the dining-room.

"While we were playing games Clouder, our

servant—of whom Elizabeth said, 'He makes perfect ladies of us all'—came in to say that I was wanted.

"I left the room, and the moment I took up the telephone I said to myself, 'Raymond is killed.'

"With the receiver in my hand, I asked what it was, and if the news was bad.

"Our secretary, Davies, answered, 'Terrible, terrible news. Raymond was shot dead on the 15th. Haig writes full of sympathy, but no details. The Guards were in and he was shot leading his men the moment he had gone over the parapet.'

"I put back the receiver and sat down. I heard Elizabeth's delicious laugh, and a hum of talk and smell of cigars came down the passage from the dining-room.

"I went back into the sitting-room.

" 'Raymond is dead,' I said, 'he was shot leading his men over the top on Friday.'

"Puffin got up from his game and hanging his head took my hand; Elizabeth burst into tears, for though she had not seen Raymond since her return from Munich she was devoted to him. Maud Tree and Florry Bridges suggested I should put off telling Henry the terrible news as he was happy.

I walked away with the two children and rang the bell:

" 'Tell the Prime Minister to come and speak to me,' I said to the servant.

"Leaving the children, I paused at the end of the dining-room passage; Henry opened the door and we stood facing each other. He saw my thin wet face, and while he put his arm round me I said:

" 'Terrible, terrible news.'

"At this he stopped me and said:

" 'I know. . . . I've known it. . . . Raymond is dead.'

"He put his hands over his face and we walked into an empty room and sat down in silence."

[*End of Diary Quotation*]

CHAPTER IV

CABINET INTRIGUES—PRESSURE ON THE PREMIER—ASQUITH RESIGNS; LLOYD GEORGE SUCCEEDS HIM—EPISODE AT A TEA-PARTY; HARSH TREATMENT OF ALIENS

10 *Downing Street, December,* 1916.

I HAVE outlined the beginning of the intrigue which led to my husband's resignation; but although I have kept a careful and precise record of all that happened in the last months and weeks of the year 1916 it is not my purpose to quote the conversations or correspondence either public or private that led up to the final event. Had it not been that we are threatened with the publication of several memoirs upon the subject I would not have referred to it at all. The anonymous volumes which have already appeared are negligible; as it is safe to assume when an author is ashamed to reveal his name, the book is either written in the servants' hall, or by prejudiced and confused eavesdroppers.

After Lord Kitchener's death in June a reconstruction of the Cabinet became inevitable, and when I heard who had succeeded him at the War Office, I wrote in my Diary:

"We are out: it can only be a question of time now when we shall have to leave Downing Street."

My opinion was shared by none of Henry's secretaries, and some of his family abjured me for them.

The trackless progress of intrigue interests people of different characters in varying degrees. To men like my husband, Lord Grey, Lord Buckmaster, or Lord Crewe, no one but the boldest or silliest would mention the subject, and the confidential few to whom I spoke met my fears with surprise tempered by disapproval. I felt a sense of acute isolation in those last months in Downing Street, while I observed what was going on as clearly as you see fish in a bowl.

In a book, entitled "The Pomp of Power," which I have just received, I find a wholly erroneous account of what occurred in December, 1916. On page 155, I read:

December 3rd, 1916.

"Asquith came back on Sunday; and that afternoon the Unionist members of the Government wrote him that they resigned if Lloyd George did. In fact, they did send in their resignations, but withdrew them when Asquith replied that the matter raised by Lloyd George was not settled."

None of Mr. Asquith's colleagues resigned; nor did a single member of them write to him. No one was more surprised than his Unionist colleagues when they were summoned to a meeting suddenly and unexpectedly called on Sunday, the 3rd of December—to which Lord Lansdowne was not invited. We were subsequently told that the written decision taken at that meeting was torn up on its way to 10 Downing Street, and all that we received was a verbal message to the effect that some of the colleagues wished the Prime Minister to resign.

Given sufficient reason you will always find a high standard of honour among certain kinds of thieves, and personal ambition, after Love, is the strongest motive in life.

To bring off a big thing with success, you must not only be highly prepared and choose your mo-

ment, but you must be certain of your men, and nothing interested me more in those Autumn manœuvres than speculating upon the rewards promised, and the motives that moved the men who were engaged upon them.

To-day I can write with calm of these events, but at the time of their occurrence I was shocked and wounded by the meanness, ingratitude and lack of loyalty shown to a man who in all the years he had been Prime Minister had disproved these qualities in a high degree.

Mr. Lloyd George could never have formed his Government in the December of 1916, had Mr. Balfour or the Labour leaders refused to join it. It is at least probable that neither Lord Curzon, Lord Robert Cecil, Mr. Walter Long or Mr. Austen Chamberlain would have served under the present Prime Minister if their old chief had stood out at that moment, and I doubt if Mr. Bonar Law or Lord Carson even with the assistance of a large body of the Press, could have succeeded in the task.

To transfer the allegiance of the majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party from one combination to another was easier of achievement after the promises made than I had supposed, and Mr. Bal-

four acquiesced. After this defection it would have been difficult, if not impossible, for my husband to carry on the Government.

The situation of our soldiers fighting abroad was too anxious for him to contemplate fighting for himself at home, and on the 5th, after consultation with other colleagues, he sent the King his resignation.

To a man of Henry's type, the knowledge of what others were suffering would always preclude him from thinking of himself, nor is it a topic he can ever be accused of dwelling upon. It is certain that one Prime Minister could not have retained office throughout the whole period of the War, and as long as a war is won, it matters little to the right sort of Commander who claims the credit for it.

My husband fell on the battlefield surrounded by civilians and soldiers whom he had fought for, and saved; some of whom owed him not only their reputations and careers, but their very existence. Only a handful of faithful men remained by his side to see whether he was killed or wounded, and on the 7th of December, Mr. Lloyd George became Prime Minister.

Among the many amusing and pathetic letters we received at that time, was the following, from

one of our Junior Liberal Whips. It was dated December 8th, 1916; and ended:

"I am going to continue to work in the little post to which you so kindly appointed me in 1915. Mr. George has expressed the wish that I and others should carry on.

"You are my Party Leader, and I believe and hope that we shall have the honour of again serving under your supreme command. I feel rather like Judas Iscariot must have done."

Two days after this we went to Walmer Castle where my husband was taken ill, and he never returned to Downing Street.

Walmer Castle,
December 12th, 1916.

While watching the ships out of the windows at Walmer Castle on the evening of the 12th of December, a servant told me that I was wanted on the telephone to speak to someone at the War Office. I took up the receiver and listened to the following:

"Take a pencil, and write this for our dear Prime Minister: 'Germany together with her Allies conscious of her responsibility before God, their own

nation and humanity, have proposed this morning to the hostile Powers, Peace negotiations.' "

I recognised the voice of our friend, Evelyn Fitzgerald. He ended by saying:

"Tell our beloved Prime Minister that Jack Cowans wished him to know this; we are all thinking of him at the War Office I can tell you! I can't bear to hear he is ill. Give him our love please."

I got up and walked down the passage to Henry's room.

As the Doctor had warned me that he was not to be bothered by letters or conversation, I hesitated after opening his door:

"Come in," he said, "you don't disturb me."

I found him lying in bed wide awake, and his room was dark.

I went to the window and read out loud the first German Peace Proposal.

When I had finished, he sat up and said:

"How I wish I could believe that someone would have the wits to keep this door ajar."

. . . . . .

After the amazing fables purposely spread and foolishly believed, that my husband's conduct of the

first two years of war was too slack ever to win it, it is instructive to remember that it was under his Administration that the Germans first prayed for Peace. General Ludendorff confesses that by December, 1916, the Germans had lost the war.

In Volume I of his War Memoirs he writes of the situation at the end of 1916:

"We could not contemplate an offensive ourselves, having to keep our reserves available for defence. There was no hope of a collapse of any of the Entente Powers. If the war lasted, our defeat seemed inevitable. Economically we were in a highly unfavourable position for a war of exhaustion. At home our strength was badly shaken. Questions of the supply of food-stuffs caused great anxiety and so, too, did questions of *'moral.'* We were not undermining the spirits of the enemy populations with starvation, blockades and propaganda. The future looked dark, and our only comfort was to be found in defying a superior enemy and that our line was everywhere beyond our frontiers."

. . . . . .

An Episode—1917.

It might have been thought that War, with its weeping nights and solitary mornings, would have silenced rumour; that the fearing and faint at home would have been infected by the radiant and courageous abroad, and that such unknown human sufferings as the world went through in 1914 would have made men kind; but it was not so.

From the first day the cry went up that we were to "hunt out the Germans in our midst," and you had only to suggest that the person you disliked for reasons either social or political had German blood or German sympathies and a witch-hunt was started as cruel and persistent as any in the 14th century.

Our treatment of aliens was worse than that of any of the Allies. We crushed their business, ruined their homes, boycotted their families and drove their wives into asylums. Not a voice was raised from Christian pulpits; but Prelates were photographed on gun-carriages chatting to soldiers on the glories of battle.

Whatever other wars accomplished for other people, ours did not make us good.

A minor Minister was hounded out of public life

because his wife had gone to see the soldier son of an old German friend of hers, who was imprisoned here, an action which stirred Mayfair to its foundations.

There are many fine texts on the subjects, but no sermon was preached upon them.

In chapter 26th of Matthew it says:

"For I was an-hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

"Naked, and ye clothed me, I was sick, and ye visited me, I was in prison, and ye came unto me. . . .

"Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

While the New Testament was forgotten, the newspapers were devoured, and women collected round tea-tables, crying out against the Minister's wife with as much vigour as the Jews shouted for Barabbas. I hardly knew the guilty lady by sight, but was taken on about the affair one afternoon at a fashionable tea-party.

First Lady (challenging me on my entrance

into the room): "Well, Margot. I suppose you've heard of this disgraceful affair?"

"What affair?" said I.

SECOND LADY: "Mrs. L—— H—— whose husband is in our Foreign Office, has been to see a Hun soldier in prison!"

I replied: "Really! Did she go to see him regularly?"

SAME LADY: "Oh, I don't say that! but quite often enough! Someone told me she went three times last year."

"Was he a friend of hers?" I asked.

THIRD LADY (in horror-stricken voice): "Why, most certainly he was! Not only the boy, but I believe his mother also. Can you imagine any woman being a friend of a German? Or going to see the brutes! It's really too disgusting! While all our poor boys are being slaughtered."

FOURTH LADY: "It makes one's blood boil! What I say is, our sons will have died in vain if we ever forgive or befriend a Hun again."

There was a pause after this, broken by the first lady:

"Well, Margot, you say nothing: I strongly suspect you think she was right!"

"Not at all!" I answered. "She was quite wrong; I think Mrs. L. H. ought to have gone far oftener to the prison. It was the least she could have done if she was a friend of the boy's mother."

. . . . . .

One day in 1916 while I was serving tea to wounded Tommies at a party given by Lady Garvagh, which I did once a week, my hostess—the kindest of women—irrelevantly introduced me at one of the long tables. She said to the soldiers, stretching her arm in a gesture of welcome over the hot water urn:

"I am sure you will be glad to meet Mrs. Asquith —the wife of our Prime Minister you know—who has so kindly come . . ."

At this I stopped her, and said to the men:

"I think it very kind of you to let me come here and give you tea at this concert. I can't sing, or act, or do anything amusing, and I'm sure someone else ought to have been in my place to-day."

A typical West End lady at my elbow—also pouring out tea—interrupted me with emphasis; and looking at the soldiers said:

"I am sure we are glad to meet Mrs. Asquith; it will give you an opportunity of telling her how

you British soldiers were treated in the German camps and prisons; *very* different from the way we treat the German prisoners here!!"

Suspecting nothing, and full of sympathy, I said:

"Ah! yes, from what I hear you have all suffered Hell! What terrible people the Germans seem to have become! I can hardly bear to think of their cruelty!"

I had scarcely finished my sentence when I saw the lady's eye gleam, and in an acid voice she said to a charming-looking Tommy, upon whom I was waiting:

"Yes, indeed! All of you were as ill-treated in Germany as their prisoners are pampered here. Perhaps Mrs. Asquith should be informed a little about Donnington Hall."

"I suddenly recognised the *John Bull* touch, and was reinforced in my conviction by the look of acute observation on the face of the soldier; I said rather coldly to her:

"You may be right, but how do you know? I have never visited a German soldier in my life, nor seen Donnington Hall; I don't even know where it is."

The Tommy, instinctively feeling by my voice that the temperature was rising, looked at the lady quietly:

"Would you have us treat the German prisoners like they treated us, miss?" he said. "*I* think your prisoner is your guest."

The lady, drawing her head up like a goose on a green, walked majestically away.

. . . . . .

No one who had neither lover, brother, son or husband in the trenches can have any idea of the agony of the early years of the war; and when a lady of foreign birth, too flippant to feel, and too noisy to pray, posed before the public, and pandered to the Press by saying on a platform that she had constantly been to 10 Downing Street on matters of vital importance during the war, and had felt horrified at the indifference exhibited by the Asquiths, she was not merely improvising, but displaying the kind of cruelty which is the exclusive property of women. No man would have said that of a family who had had one son killed, another shell-shocked, and the third maimed for life.

Alfred de Musset writes:

"Quoi! tu n'as pas d'étoile et tu vas sur la mer!
Au combat sans musique, au voyage sans livre!
Quoi! tu n'as pas d'amour et tu parles de vivre!"

. . . . . .

CHAPTER V

GERMAN PEACE OVERTURES—LORD LANSDOWNE'S LETTER—THE MAURICE LETTER—FOCH AS GENERALISSIMO—HOUSE OF COMMONS DEBATE ON MAURICE CHARGE

20 *Cavendish Square*, 1917.

IN the autumn of 1917 I received a visit from one of our footmen who was home upon leave. When I heard of his death a few weeks later I felt profoundly sad: he was not only a friend of mine, but I was haunted by the memory of our last conversation. After asking him several questions about the progress of the war he said:

"If you saw as many Germans as we do, you would know that none of them expect to break through to the coast. Is there anyone in England who thinks we are going to push the enemy back to Berlin, Ma'am?"

His question was unanswerable, and it became clearer to me every day that the war could only end in one of three ways: Victory on the Battlefields; Conference; or Revolution. No sane man could imagine our Army pushing the Germans back

to Berlin, and only an insane one could want Revolution.

When my footman said "Good-bye," he told me with bitterness how much he and his brother soldiers loathed the war: how they neither wanted to kill, or be killed; and implied that he would be only one more corpse to heighten the heap in the interval, before anyone of sufficient courage would come forward to suggest a temporary truce.

One morning shortly after this on the 29th of November my husband called me into his library.

Professor Gilbert Murray, Lord Charles Montagu and Lord Lansdowne were coming to lunch at 20 Cavendish Square and it was past one o'clock.

I found him walking up and down. He put the *Daily Telegraph* into my hands saying:

"I would like you to read this quickly before Lansdowne arrives."

I sat down and read the following memorable letter addressed to the Editor and dated November 29th, 1917:

"Sir,*

"We are now in the fourth year of the most dreadful war the world has known; a war in which,

* This is a curtailed edition of Lord Lansdowne's letter.

as Sir W. Robertson has lately informed us, 'the killed alone can be counted by the million, while the total number of men engaged amounts to nearly twenty-four millions.' Ministers continue to tell us that they scan the horizon in vain for the prospect of a lasting peace.

"But those who believe that the wanton prolongation of the war would be a crime, differing only in degree from that of the criminals who provoked it, may be excused if they, too, scan the horizon anxiously in the hope of discovering there indications that the outlook may after all not be so hopeless as is supposed.

"The obstacles are indeed formidable enough. It is pointed out with force that, while we have not hesitated to put forward a general description of our war aims, the enemy have, though repeatedly challenged, refused to formulate theirs, and have limited themselves to vague and apparently insincere professions of readiness to negotiate with us.

"What are we fighting for? To beat the Germans? Certainly. But that is not an end in itself. We want to inflict signal defeat upon the Central Powers, not out of vindictiveness, but in the hope

of saving the world from a recurrence of the calamity which has befallen this generation.

"What, then, is it we want when the war is over? I know of no better formula than that made by Mr. Asquith in the speeches which he has from time to time delivered. He has repeatedly told his hearers that we are waging war in order to obtain reparation and security. In the way of reparation much can be accomplished, but the utmost effort to make good the ravages of this war must fall short and will fail to undo the grievous wrong which has been done to humanity. To end the war honourably would be a great achievement; to prevent the same curse falling upon our children would be a greater achievement still.

"This is our avowed aim, and the magnitude of the issue cannot be exaggerated. For, just as this war has been more dreadful than any in history, so we may be sure would the next be even more dreadful than this. The prostitution of science for the purpose of pure destruction is not likely to stop short. Most of us, however, believe that it should be possible to secure posterity against the repetition of such an outrage as that of 1914. If the Powers will, under a solemn pact, bind them-

selves to submit future disputes to Arbitration; if they will undertake to outlaw, politically and economically, any one of their number which refuses to enter into such a pact, or to use their joint military and naval forces for the purpose of coercing a Power which breaks away from the rest, they will have travelled far along the road which leads to security.

"We are not going to lose this war, but its prolongation will spell ruin for the civilised world, and an infinite addition to the load of human suffering which already weighs upon it.

"In my belief, if the war is to be brought to a close in time to avert a world-wide catastrophe, it will be brought to a close because on both sides the people of the countries involved realise that it has already lasted too long.

"There can be no question that this feeling prevails extensively in Germany, Austria and Turkey. We know beyond doubt that the economic pressure in those countries far exceeds any to which we are subject here. Ministers inform us in their speeches of 'constant efforts' on the part of the Central Powers to 'initiate peace talk.' (Sir Eric Geddes at the Mansion House, November 9.)

"If the peace talk is not more articulate, and has not been so precise as to enable His Majesty's Government to treat it seriously, the explanation is probably to be found in the fact, first, that German despotism does not tolerate independent expressions of opinion, and second, that the German Government has contrived, probably with success, to misrepresent the aims of the Allies, which are supposed to include the destruction of Germany.

"An immense stimulus would probably be given to the peace party in Germany if it were understood:

"1. That we do not desire the annihilation of Germany as a Great Power;

"2. That, except as a legitimate war measure, we have no desire to deny to Germany her place among the great commercial communities of the world;

"3. That we are prepared, when the war is over, to examine in concert with other Powers the group of international problems, some of them of recent origin, which are connected with the question of 'the freedom of the seas';

"4. We are prepared to enter into an international pact under which ample opportunities

would be afforded for the settlement of international disputes by peaceful means.

"That an attempt should be made to bring about the kind of pact suggested is, I believe, common ground to all the Belligerents, and probably to all the Neutral Powers.

"If it be once established that there are no insurmountable difficulties in the way of agreement upon these points the political horizon might perhaps be scanned with better hope by those who pray, but can hardly at this moment venture to expect, that the New Year may bring us a lasting and honourable Peace.

"I am, Sir,

"Your obedient servant,

"LANSDOWNE."

LANSDOWNE HOUSE,

November 28th, 1917.

When I had finished, Henry said:

"This is an excellent and sensible letter which will make a great to-do! It is unfortunately ill-timed, but this it would be always called, whether he had published it when we were winning or los-

ing. I am glad Lansdowne has had the courage to write it."

He went on to say that though he had never had the faintest doubt—nor had he now—as to our ultimate Victory, he thought the war was likely to end on the same spot where it had begun, and that if the minds of men could only see far enough, they would treat Lansdowne's ideas with respect.

At that moment we were interrupted by a servant announcing lunch.

After greeting my guests I looked at Lord Lansdowne and said to myself: "Here is a man of high honour and estate, who though a Unionist with most of his former colleagues in Office, has revolted against the 'Dog-fight' speeches, the heartless swagger and inefficiency of the men who are governing us."

I told him during lunch what Henry had thought of his letter, at which he said:

"I am much relieved by what you say. As you know, long ago I said—*and you agreed*—that some Nation would have to speak first. If we all wait for the right moment we shall certainly wait for ever. With the collapse of Italy, and Russia in a state of Revolution, it is, of course, a bad time

to speak, but as I shall be cursed by everyone, a little more or less matters nothing. I agree with your husband; neither the Allies nor the Germans will push their Victory into the enemy's country, and the war will end where it began."

I told him what my footman had said, and added:

"It seems savagely cruel, and of doubtful wisdom, to pile up corpses for a delayed Conference."

Mr. Bonar Law, Lord Carson and every newspaper vied with the other next day in vilifying Lord Lansdowne, and London was seen at its worst. He was the "Bolo," the "Shirker," and the "Funk." The gutter Press published photographs of Lansdowne House bracketed with irrelevant pictures of slums and starving children; nor was it outsiders alone who heaped infamy upon him, members of his own family publicly repudiated him.

I was interested to observe that this abuse was *not* universal in Mayfair, and some of our high Society had the courage to praise Lord Lansdowne, though in lowered voices. General Grant and other Commanders, home on leave, informed me that many of our best soldiers here and abroad,

not only agreed with the letter, but *wished* it had been written months before.

In saying this I do not mean that Lord Lansdowne or any of his admirers thought that Germany would win the war. I personally never met anyone who thought that—although I was told after the Armistice the names of a few who did—but many of the men whose judgment I valued foresaw, with singular accuracy, how little there is to be gained by a long war, even to the victors. Large fortunes, however, were being accumulated and it is surprising how easily non-combatants get acclimatised to Death.

The Maurice Debate—1917.

The year 1918 opened by the enemy announcing their great Spring Offensive. This was advertised with such boldness and persistence throughout the entire German Press that many people did not believe in it. As public opinion is seldom right this would not have mattered, but in spite of many warnings from my husband and soldiers of eminence, the Government were equally short-sighted, and refused to do in time what they were afterwards compelled to do when it was al-

most too late: bring back to France troops which they had allowed to be dispersed in distant theatres.

The Versailles Conference, an assemblage of Nations, who while imposing in appearance were powerless in reality, had served the purpose of taking the eye off. After much talk in a Babel of languages, great decisions were taken behind the backs of our General Staff, and the British public knew little of what was going on. The desire to create an impression of success, and what is called strike the enemy in his weakest spot, and the Prime Minister's military and political manœuvres at that time must have lost us the war had it not been for an unforeseen incident.

On the 21st of March, Mr. Bonar Law made the following statement in the House of Commons:

"I may tell the House that this attack had been launched on the very part of our line which we were informed would be attacked by the enemy if an attack were undertaken at all. Only three days ago we received information at the Cabinet from Headquarters in France that they had definitely come to the conclusion that an attack was going to be launched immediately. . . . I do feel justified

in saying that as it has not come as a surprise, and as those responsible for our forces have foreseen, and have throughout believed that, if such an attack came, we should be well able to meet it, nothing that has happened gives us in this country *any cause whatever for additional anxiety.*"

This speech, emphasizing the fact that the attack had come where it had been expected, coupled with the information daily repeated, that the British Army had never been stronger or better equipped, made the rumours of our military disasters on the Western Front unbelievable; and when the news of the enemy's deep penetration into our lines was confirmed, and we learnt that at the very time Mr. Bonar Law was speaking our soldiers were suffering the greatest military defeat ever inflicted on the British Army, every one was bewildered or outraged.

We were informed that between the 22nd of March and 1st of April the Germans had in a series of amazing successes, advanced their battle line forty miles, and at the urgent request of Lord Haig and Lord Milner the Supreme Command of all the Allied forces had been taken over by Marshal Foch.

Unity of command under a generalissimo was not a new idea. It had been seriously considered and rejected on sufficient grounds by my husband, Lord Kitchener, the Allied Staffs and—after the failure of Nivelle—by Mr. Lloyd George; but the tragic happenings in the Spring of 1918 converted men upon the spot, and the views of the Easternites underwent a convulsive, tardy, but wholesome change.

The appointment of the great French soldier restored confidence and was received with universal acclamation; but the situation remained anxious, and the conflict continued between those who believed in triumph in the East, and those who foresaw the danger on the West.

Reviewing the situation now, it seems incredible that anyone could have been as wanting in sense as to believe that striking the Turk was killing the German, but the moral purpose of the conflict had degenerated, and spectacular effects to cheer the faint-hearted and bamboozle the public were the order of the day.

Nothing throughout the war betrayed the value of men's judgment, or the quality of their characters more than the opinions they held as to the relative dangers that lay in the East or in the West.

There was only one great strategic conception in the war, and that was the Dardanelles; once that had failed, it was obvious to Sir William Robertson, Sir Frederick Maurice and Sir Douglas Haig that we had to stonewall the West, and that every side-show was a drain upon our resources.

On the 23rd of March, 1918, the Kaiser's telegram to his wife was published:

"Pleased to be able to tell you that by the Grace of God the Battles at Moully, Cambrai, St. Quentin, and La Fère have been won. The Lord has gloriously aided. May He further help.

"WILHELM."

Someone said that the Kaiser's telegram reminded him of a parody on his grandfather's (King William of Prussia) messages to his consort during the 1870 Campaign:—

"By right Divine, my dear Augusta
We've had another awful buster,
Ten thousand Frenchmen sent below
Praise God from Whom all blessings flow."

In spite of a bombardment of questions put daily by Liberals in the House of Commons as to the

A Mrs Asquith,
En souvenir de 1914,
respectueux hommage,
F. Foch

MARSHAL FOCH

fighting strength upon our dangerously extended line, the country was kept in complete ignorance, and it was not until the 9th of April that Mr. Lloyd George made a statement in the House which satisfied the ignorant but terrified the Army.

Referring to the series of set-backs we had had, and defending his policy in the East, the Prime Minister said:

"What was the position at the beginning of the battles? Notwithstanding the heavy casualties in 1917 the Army in France was considerably stronger on the 1st * of January, 1918, than on the 1st of January, 1917."

Further on in the same speech he told us that we had only one white Division in Egypt, and only three in Palestine.

May 7th, 1918.

On the 7th of May the man who had held the position of the greatest responsibility throughout the war, that of Director of Military Operations—General Sir Frederick Maurice—published his famous letter in all the London papers categorically

* Hansard, Vol. 104, No. 24, page 1, 328.

denying the accuracy of the Prime Minister's statements.

Nothing since the Lansdowne letter showed as much courage as this, and everyone in London who knew anything about the matter was in a state of indignant perturbation. Telling the truth is always unpopular and usually regarded as a blunder, but sacrificing half your income and the whole of your career for it, was looked upon as a crime, and we watched with interest the bluster of our thoughtful Press, and the Chinese antics of the Government.

Some of the newspapers said the letter was "prompted by the personal pettiness of Mr. Asquith," and others affirmed that Sir Frederick Maurice was an intriguer and a Pacifist.

I did not know General Maurice by sight until the year 1920, and neither my husband nor anyone connected with us had any conversation with him about the events which led up to and followed the publication of his letter.

Three years later, in 1922, General Maurice told me that the only person he had approached at that time was Lord Salisbury. In the course of a conversation about his letter he said:

"I may have been foolishly punctilious, Mrs. Asquith, as far as my own interests were concerned, but I decided that I must act entirely alone, first because I would not give away confidential information, and secondly because I felt I could not ask anyone to share the responsibility of advising me in a matter which so vitally affected my future. I went over to France in the middle of April, 1918, and I there heard that Mr. Lloyd George's statements of April 9th had produced consternation and were regarded as a direct attack upon Haig. On my return I consulted Lord Salisbury, because I regarded him as a man of the highest honour representing a large body of the best Conservative opinion in the country, and one who would advise me without Party passion and in the best interest of the Army. I told him what I had heard in France, and the fears I had as to what would happen in our Army there if the policy of throwing the blame for what had happened on to the soldiers was continued. I told Lord Salisbury no secrets and I only sent him a copy of my letter on the same day as I sent it to the Press. The decision to write the letter was made by me without consultation with anyone because I could not give any-

one the full facts. I wrote it to prevent the crime of sacking Haig after a false case had been trumped up against him. I did not believe that we could win if we didn't fight clean."

Had the affair not been so alarming, we would have been more than amused by the hysterical comments made and written at the time. The views of the fashionable female in moments of national crisis seldom disappoint one, and when a Tory lady who was in the habit of ejaculating "Cad!" in the middle of Mr. Lloyd George's speeches in the Speaker's gallery said to me on the afternoon of the day the Maurice letter appeared, that every French and British soldier adored Lloyd George, and would resent what Sir Frederick had written, adding that she hoped he would be shot as a traitor, I knew where I was.

Sir William and Lady Robertson lunched with us on the 7th, and I had a talk with him before going down to the House of Commons. I asked him what he imagined would be the effect of Sir Frederick Maurice's letter upon the public, to which he replied:

"Every word of Maurice's letter is not only true but unanswerable, Mrs. Asquith, and if the British

people are as clear-sighted, courageous and loyal as my fine friend, they will stand by him to a man; but it is not the fashion of the present Government to be loyal to the soldiers or to anyone else."

"Well," I said, "whenever the debate takes place in the House my husband will stand by him if he is the only man in the Division lobby!" to which Sir William answered:

"The red herring that will be drawn across the scent is always the same, my dear lady; and will be repeated in the House of Commons. 'Out to win the War' is a taking cry, and has not only hoodwinked the public but done grave injustice to your husband. What I say is: show me the men who are out to lose it; the only ones I know are X—— and his friends, and unless they are watched they will certainly succeed."

I asked him if he thought a full and accurate report of our military failures of March and April would ever be permitted to see the light of day, to which he gave a guarded reply.

After lunch we drove to the House of Commons, and in an answer to a question put by my husband, pointing out the gravity of the charges made by Sir Frederick Maurice, Mr. Bonar Law, looking

pained and deprecatory, and speaking for the Prime Minister—who did not appear—suggested there should be an Inquiry, and gave the 9th as a day for the Debate.

It is interesting to speculate at this time of day what would have happened had Sir William Robertson been Chief of Staff in the Spring of that year, but a series of acrobatic feats during the early weeks of February—in which it would be difficult to say which of the men in high places came out the worst—had succeeded in putting Sir Henry Wilson in his place, while retaining the services of Lord Derby at the War Office.

When it was announced on February 19th that Sir William Robertson had been transferred to the Eastern Command as a reward for his long services, I heard shouts in the House of Commons of "Boy Scouts!" "Kent Coast!" etc. Nor was the British public any happier when a few days later the campaign was opened to get rid of Sir Douglas Haig.

During all this time not a murmur of criticism against either the methods or policy of the Government was permitted; and my husband gave serious offence by saying in a public speech that he was

accused of breaking every Commandment whenever he made the mildest protest, except that subsection of the Tenth, which forbade him to covet his neighbour's ass.

The anti-Haig campaign began well, but collapsed with the alarm produced by the Maurice letter, and the Government was shaking in its shoes.

No. 20 Cavendish Square was beseiged by men of all kinds, and every shade of opinion. Unionists, to whom the name of Asquith was anathema, poured in as well as retired Officers, Peers, Journalists, Editors and Commoners, to implore my husband to stand by the soldiers and save England.

The Editor of the best written of all our Tory papers, a complete stranger, and a man who had genuinely believed every fable about Henry, called upon me.

After a generous apology for some of the nonsense his paper had published, we entered into a long political conversation, and I was struck by his transparent simplicity and the honesty of his purpose. It is difficult to understand why even gentlemen journalists are so ill-informed, and there is something pathetic in going through life imagin-

ing you are leading public opinion when you are merely following it.

Mr. G—— said if my husband could but stand by our soldiers he would not only save us from defeat in the War, but it would be a decision which he would never regret; and added that he was in close touch with Unionists of every description, and felt sure they would back him to a man in both Houses. He spoke in the highest terms of Sir William Robertson, going as far as to suggest he might become Prime Minister of the country if my husband would only serve under him. I said I did not think Sir William had any wish to occupy this position, but assured him that my husband had not the slightest intention of deserting either Sir Frederick Maurice or our soldiers, whether he was, or whether he was not, backed by the great Unionist Party.

When Henry and I were alone he told me he had seen Lord Salisbury among others that morning, and found him deeply exercised. I said that his influence in the Lords, and the men of honour in the Commons—Sir Frederick Banbury, Lord Robert Cecil, Lord Henry Bentinck and other Unionists of repute, were certain to vote with us,

as there was no chance of our having a large enough majority to turn the Government out; and that by now most people must have discovered the price our unhappy soldiers were paying for the reckless gambles of the Cabinet. To this he replied that if the Unionist Party in either House had as much courage or independence as I attributed to them, they would not have been led by the nose for such a long time, and ended by making me a bet, that when the moment arrived, not one of them would stick to his guns either in the House of Lords or the House of Commons.

Between the 7th and the 9th, the Cabinet at the instigation of Mr. Balfour, changed its mind, and the Inquiry—which they had themselves suggested—was turned into a vote of censure. It was the only chance they had of protecting themselves from criticism, and the patriotic drum of showing the enemy a united front was easy and cheap to beat. No one ever gauged the value of the late House of Commons or of the present one with more cynical precision than Mr. Lloyd George, and he was bound to succeed once he realised the negligible moral fibre of the majority of his supporters.

In spite of the confidence some of the better in-

formed had in my husband's reluctance to give away the sources of his information * the Government was terrified. They knew that without quoting his authority he would be expressing the well-known and considered opinion of the High Command, and feared that when he had finished speaking he might be backed by some eloquent and unsuspected man of character in the House. In consequence, anything and everything was promised to Members upon either side who would support them in the Division Lobby on the day of the Debate.

May 9th, 1918.

It is never easy, and often ineffectual to fire small arms at guns of position; but when I went down to the House of Commons on the 9th of May, recollecting what had been said to me by indignant Unionists and other brave men, I felt convinced that Henry had underrated not only the moral courage but the common sense of the House, and that although it had sometimes turned a blind eye upon much that was dishonourable and untrue, it was awake and in earnest that day, and would stand loyally by our soldiers to repudiate the men-

* We received many private letters from the Front expressing the deepest anxiety over the situation.

acing and disastrous side-shows conducted from 10 Downing Street.

Upon my arrival I found my husband's room full of his devoted supporters.

As it was the first time since leaving Downing Street that he had censured the Government, many of them were anxious he should withdraw his motion, begging him not to give so cheap a triumph to his Opponents. They pointed out with truth that the huge majority which would be whipped up against him would be misunderstood, and might discourage Liberals all over the country. His answer was simple, nor could he be induced to alter it.

"I will not throw over Maurice, or any other soldier in this war; and if I am the only man I shall register my vote against the Government to-day."

The debate was not well managed, and the force of Henry's opening speech was fatally diminished by his inability to give away the sources of his information. The result was a foregone conclusion. Fear, promises, and assiduous whipping gave the Government a large majority.

The satisfaction of having done the right thing was enhanced to my husband when in scanning the Division lists he observed to me that with the excep-

tion of our dear friend, Aubrey Herbert,* the men I had believed in had all deserted.

I have sometimes wondered what would have happened if any man that afternoon had had the brains or the courage to wind up the Maurice debate with words like these:

"The angel of Death has been abroad throughout the land; you may almost hear the flapping of His wings. There is no one . . . to sprinkle with blood the lintel and the sideposts of our doors, that He may spare and pass on; He takes His victims from the castle of the noble, the mansion of the wealthy, and the cottage of the poor and lowly, and it is on behalf of all these classes that I make this solemn appeal. Even if I were alone, if my voice were the solitary one raised amid the din of arms and the clamour of a venal Press, I should have the consolation I have to-night, and which I trust will be mine to the last moment of my existence, the priceless consolation, that no word of mine has tended to promote the squandering of my country's treasure or the spilling of one single drop of my country's blood."

* Col. The Hon. Aubrey Herbert.

CHAPTER VI

ARMISTICE DAY IN LONDON—SCENE AT BUCKINGHAM PALACE AND ST. PAUL'S—PORTRAIT OF PRESIDENT WILSON—THE KHAKI ELECTIONS AND DEFEAT OF THE LIBERALS

20 *Cavendish Square,*
Sunday, November 10*th,* 1918.

WHEN my daughter Elizabeth ran into my bedroom at midnight in her nightgown on the 10th of November, 1918, to tell me that the war was over, I felt as numb as an old piano with broken notes in it. The strain of four years—waiting and watching, opening and reading telegrams upon matters of life and death, and the recurring news of failure at the Front had blunted all my receptive powers, and what she said did not seem to penetrate me.

A young man from the War Office had rung her up to tell her that the Germans had signed the Armistice. I put on my dressing-gown and took her into her father's room, where we found him reading. Being far too excited to go to bed, we

sat together talking over the probable terms of Peace till far into the morning.

November 11*th*, 1918.

After drinking my tea at 6 o'clock the next day (Monday) and feeling too tired to write my diary, I lay awake reviewing the past and chronicling in my mind the many events that had taken place since we had left Downing Street.

The door suddenly opened and my husband came into the room to say that what we had heard and discussed in the middle of the night was inaccurate, as the Germans had not signed after all. I felt no surprise, but he had hardly shut the door before the bell of my telephone started ringing, and taking up the receiver I recognised the voice of my American friend, Mr. Paul Cravath:

"The Germans signed the Armistice at 5.30 this morning and the War is over," he said.

I ran downstairs and gave orders for as many flags as could be bought, for the house, the roof, and the motor; and wrote three telegrams. The first was to the King, the second to Queen Alexandra, and the third to General Sir John Cowans;

I took them into my husband's room and we signed them: "Henry Margot Asquith."

While reading the newspapers, odd noises from the streets broke upon my ears. Faint sounds of unfinished music; a medley of guns, maroons, cheering, and voices shouting "The British Grenadiers," and "God Save the King." I looked out of the window and saw elderly nurses in uniform, and stray men and women clasping each other round the waist, laughing and dancing in the centre of the street.

It was a brilliant day and the sky was light.

Henry and I felt it our duty to attend the cremation of a relation, and motored to Golders Green immediately after breakfast. I had never been there before, and was struck by the bleakness of the ceremony.

Just as Railway Stations are man without God, so is the Cremation a funeral without a landscape. A button is pressed and an elaborate kind of casket—if less clumsy quite as costly as a coffin—disappears upon runners through the wall, and your mind, which should be bowed over the silence and inevitability of Death—as interpreted by the fine Burial Service—is alive and quickened by curiosity

over the mechanism of the folding doors, and the subsequent consignment of the casket.

Nothing, however, could affect us seriously that morning. The whole thoughts of the scanty congregation were either circulating round the signatories of the Armistice, or centred on some nameless grave in France.

When we returned from Hampstead we could see the progress that the great news had made. Flags, big and little, of every colour and nationality were flying from roofs, balconies and windows. The men who were putting them up were waving their caps at each other from the top of high ladders, and conventional pedestrians were whistling or dancing breakdowns on the pavement; a more spontaneous outbreak of simple gaiety could hardly have been imagined, and I have sometimes wondered if any of the Allies on that day gave way to such harmless explosions of innocent joy.

We arrived at No. 20 and found that our thoughtful butler,* with praiseworthy patriotism, had smothered the house in flags; even the Welsh harp could be seen fluttering greenly from the window of Henry's library.

* Mr. Clouder.

I was told that in a short time it would be impossible to move in the streets except upon foot, as they were already jammed with waggons, trollies, motor-cars and coster-carts; and that the queues outside the shops which sold flags were of such a length as to block the passage of any passers-by. On hearing this I jumped into the motor and told our chauffeur to drive down the main streets so that I might see the crowd. It was a wonderful sight, and more like a foreign carnival than what we are accustomed to in this country. Heavy motor lorries were flying backwards and forwards stacked with munition workers; males and females in brilliant colours were standing on each other's shoulders yelling and waving flags or shaking tambourines at one another. Everyone was nailing up some sort of decoration, or quizzing his neighbour. No one intended to work that day, nor could they be expected to when the whole world was rejoicing.

On my return home I found my husband standing in the front hall holding a telegram. He put his arm round my shoulder, and, side by side, we read:

"I thank you both with all my heart. I look back with gratitude to your wise counsel and calm resolve in the days when great issues had to be decided resulting in our entry into the war, which now, thank God, has been brought to an end.

"GEORGE, R.I."

We looked at each other with tears in our eyes.

I opened two other telegrams addressed to myself, one from Queen Alexandra, and the other from my little son.

"In the great rejoicing which we share with you and the people all over our Empire, we do not forget your husband to-day.

"ALEXANDRA."

"Blessings and love, my darling mother. Do you know this from Euripides: 'The things that must be are so strangely great!'

"ANTHONY."

After lunch we motored to the House of Commons to hear the terms of the Armistice read by Mr. Lloyd George.

Thinking the Speaker's Gallery would be crowded I went alone, but to my surprise it was

almost empty and I wished profoundly that I had taken Elizabeth, as I enjoy nothing to the same degree without her or Anthony, and on such an occasion could have wished they had both been with me.

The grille of the Gallery having been removed I was able to put my elbows on the rail and watch excited members rushing through the glass doors into the House.

The Prime Minister and my husband received a great ovation upon their entry, and every man was moved when Mr. Lloyd George rose to read the terms of the Armistice.

The French Army, led by their victorious Generals, was to march into Germany and occupy both the banks of the Rhine, while our soldiers were to guard over Berlin and other towns of importance. The entire German Navy was to sail into Rosyth between the lines of our men-of-war ranged up upon either side. We would watch from decks cleared for action battleships that had seldom left the Kiel Canal, thick with barnacles, and stripped of paint, slowly sail into harbour with all our guns pointing at them; and every soldier was to surrender his sword upon every Front.

I pressed my forehead into my hands and a wave of emotion moved across my heart. To the average individual the terms that we had listened to were what had been expected; but I could only conjecture with compassion what they must mean to a proud race who, until 1914, had everything that industry and science could achieve, and had maintained a conflict for four years, in which they expected not only to beat France, but half Europe; and not for the first time I felt I was in a position to obey the High Command that tells us to extend mercy with judgment.

A thanksgiving service in Westminster had been improvised by the Archbishop of Canterbury, and when the Prime Minister finished speaking we all walked across Parliament Square to St. Margaret's.

As I was alone I had to fight my way through the crowd, and had it not been for a policeman who recognised me, I could never have got into the church.

After taking my seat, I observed that all the Peers and the Commons were placed in the centre of St. Margaret's, and the women in the side aisles.

The Archbishop read a simple service in moving

tones, and the whole congregation joined in singing "O God our help in ages past."

I thought of the chapter in Isaiah where it says:

"And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the Alien shall be your plowmen and your vine-dressers.

"For I the Lord love judgment, I hate robbery for burnt offering; and I will direct their work in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them."

I found my mind straying to the terms of the Armistice, and wondered whether the Germans also were saying their prayers; and if so to what God; the God of Peace? or the God of War?

When I returned to 20 Cavendish Square, my beautiful nieces,* Laura Lovat and Diana Capel, were waiting to have tea with me. They described how they had spent several hours of the morning outside Buckingham Palace, where a crowd had collected the moment the maroons informed the people that the war was over. They said that everyone in London, rich and poor, fashionable and obscure, was standing and shouting for the King, and many of the spectators had tears in their

* Lady Lovat and the Hon. Mrs. Capel.

eyes; that when they left, the crowd was greater than when they arrived, and was accumulating every minute.

I told them that as I was engaged to go and see Lord Stamfordham I would have to leave them, and we parted after tea.

It was dark and wet when I arrived at the Palace, and the courtyard so packed with people that I had to get out of the motor and walk.

The King and Queen were sitting on a balcony exposed to the rain, and two dazzling stage reflectors illuminated their faces. The people below were shouting hymns or patriotic songs and "God save the King" was being played on every kind of instrument. The W.A.A.C.'s and the W.R.N.'s were parading in close formation in the outer yard, and when I stopped to look up at the King, their Commander-in-Chief, with the rudeness habitual to women in crowds, hustled me unceremoniously out of the way.

The King was in khaki, a uniform which he had worn since the first day of the War—and the Queen was dressed in pretty light colours with diamonds and pearls round her neck. She has at all times

a lively, lovely smile, and the public were cheering two very happy people that day.

Finding myself pushed about by female agriculturists, female soldiers and female police, I took refuge from the rain with the King of Portugal, who was standing in the Palace doorway.

After a little conversation with him, a servant showed me into Lord Stamfordham's room.

Knowing that to many, and very specially to him the end of the War could not mean the end of mourning, I embraced him on both cheeks and after congratulating him on the love and service he had rendered to his King, we sat down unable to speak for emotion.

After a pause he told me that during their Majesties' drive in the afternoon the poorest of the poor had clung to their carriage and by special request of the King had not been interfered with by the police. He said that nothing could have exceeded the enthusiasm of all his Majesty's subjects.

As boxes, telegrams and people came in and out while we were talking, and my friend looked exhausted, I left him.

The rain had not stopped when I walked out of the Palace, and the King and Queen were still bow-

ing on the balcony; (I was informed afterwards that they did not leave it till after midnight, except for their meals and their drive).

November 12*th*, 1918.

On the following day we went to the General Thanksgiving Service in St. Paul's Cathedral.

Thoroughly exhausted, my thoughts strayed, and I was reminded of the American Ambassador's conversation with Elizabeth when, after a similar service had taken place the year before, upon the entry of America into the war (April 6th, 1917), my daughter had called at the American Embassy.

Mr. Page was not only one of the wisest but one of the best of men. His lanky, dislocated figure was easily recognised, and the pathos, humour, and gestures of his face had gained him the confidence and delight of us all.

He will ever remain a hero in the minds of my countrymen, as we cannot but regard the illness which ended with his death as having been brought about by the continued efforts he made to bring his President and his people into the war.

Being a very great friend of ours, a few days after we heard that America had come in, my

daughter Elizabeth went to see him. She was shocked by his appearance. Excitement and apprehension had protected him like a scaffolding, but when the strain was removed, the shakiness of the structure was revealed, and she saw without knowing it a doomed man standing in front of her.

"Dearest Mr. Page," she said, "you look ill; you can see me any day, but send me away now, as I love you far too much to tire you." To which he answered:

"My dear, it isn't talking to you that tires me; but I have received the Representatives of ten American Associations to-day, each of which has asked for a speech to be delivered in the Albert Hall. I said to them:

" 'Gentlemen, we're under the very serious temptation of making fools of ourselves. It is a temptation that we shall probably not resist, therefore it appears to me that a service in St. Paul's Cathedral would give us less opportunity than any other form of public ceremony.' "

While my memory was straying upon this and other matters the service came to an end and we all hustled out of the Cathedral.

We had been invited to lunch with the King, an

order we were proud to accept as we wanted to thank him in person for his telegram of the day before, and after leaving St. Paul's we motored straight to the Palace.

There was no sign of fatigue in their Majesties' faces when they greeted us, and the devotion shown by their subjects the day before had put them both in the highest spirits.

After kissing the Queen's hand, I said to her:

"You ought to be a very proud woman to-day, Ma'am, when all over Europe such sorrows are happening to Monarchs and Rulers, to feel how much you and His Majesty are loved by a free and happy people."

I was touched to see her eyes fill with tears. The King took my hand in both of his, and said with that directness and simplicity which are peculiarly his own:

"No man, Mrs. Asquith, ever had a better or wiser friend than I had, and *have* in your husband."

November, 1918.

A few days later, Henry seconded the address of congratulation to the King, which was moved by Mr. Lloyd George in the House of Commons.

It was a great occasion, and one which he took advantage of in a noble speech. Rising after Mr. George had sat down, he said:

"I am sure that the whole House will desire to associate itself with the admirable words in which my right hon. friend has moved this address, and with the terms of the address itself. When history comes to tell the tale of these four years, it will recount a story, the like of which is not to be found in any epic in any literature. It is and will remain by itself as a record of everything Humanity can dare or endure—of the extremes of possible heroism and, we must add, of possible baseness, and above and beyond all, the slow moving but in the end irresistible power of a great Ideal.

"The old world has been laid waste. Principalities and Powers, to all appearances inviolable and invincible, which seem to dominate a large part of the families of mankind, lie in the dust. All things have become new.

"In this great and cleansing purging it has been the privilege of our country to play her part—a part worthy of a people who have learned themselves beforehand the lesson to practise the example of ordered Freedom. The time has not come

to distribute praise between those who, in civil life and naval and military action, have won this great victory, but as my right honourable friend has well said, we can anticipate that task by rendering at once a heartfelt, unstinted tribute to the occupant of the Throne.

"I had the privilege to be Prime Minister when His Majesty ascended the Throne, and I continued to hold that office until more than two years had passed of the progress of the War. There is no one who can bear testimony—first hand testimony —more authentic or more heartfelt than I do to the splendid example which His Majesty has set in time of peace, as well as in time of war, in the discharge of every one, day by day, of the responsible duties which fall to the Sovereign of this Empire. In the crash of thrones, built, some of them, on unrighteousness, propped up in other cases by a brittle framework of convention, the Throne of this country stands unshaken, broad-based on the people's will. It has been reinforced to a degree which it is impossible to measure, a living example of our Sovereign and his gracious Consort, who have always felt and shown by their life and by their

conduct that they are there not to be ministered unto, but to minister.

"As the right hon. gentleman said, monarchies in these days are held, if they continue to be held, not by the shadowy claim of any so-called Divine Right, not, as has been the case with the Hapsburgs and Hohenzollerns, by any power of dividing and dominating popular forces and popular will, not by pedigree and not by traditions; they are held and can only be held, by the highest form of public service; by understanding, by sympathy with the common lot and by devotion to the common weal. There are some lines of one of our old poets which are perhaps worth recalling, as they sum up and express the feelings of many of us to-day:

> " 'The glories of our blood and State,
> Are shadows, not substantial things.
> There is no armour against fate,
> Death lays his icy hand on kings.' "

"And at the end of these fine lines he adds what we in these testing times in Great Britain have seen and proved to be the secret and the safeguard of our Monarchy:

> " 'Only the actions of the just
> Smell sweet and blossom in the dust.' "

The General Election of 1918.

After the signing of the Armistice it seemed a strange moment for anyone to think of himself, and when I heard it rumoured that there was to be an Election, I did not believe it.

The defeated Party is apt to describe the General Election as an outrage; but I do not think anyone to-day would say the Khaki Elections of December, 1918, had been other than a great political crime.

The chief blame of this outrageous "Coupon" Election will be ascribed in history to Mr. Lloyd George. It broke the historic Liberal Party to pieces just at the moment when Liberalism, and especially British Liberalism, was most needed at Versailles. From this assassination and the Coalition Government formed by it, have resulted most of the evils of the four years which have followed. Of the Prime Minister, the drowsiest summer owl might have observed that throughout the long period of his public service both his strength and his weakness lay in his having no policy. Neither his personal charm, infinite persuasiveness, the quick changes of an agile mind or his eloquent speeches on the British aristocracy had captivated the con-

fidence of the Conservative Party, and the Leader * of the Diehards, in a spasm of courage, wrote a fine letter to the *Morning Post*, saying there was something wrong with *their* Augean Stables and he thought that they should be purified. Nevertheless, a few days later, at a time when every moment was vital, and Peace was the Prayer of an exhausted Europe, he and the whole of his Party acquiesced in the coup of the coupon and we did what no other Ally thought of doing, we had a General Election within two months of the Armistice when men's minds were confused with the coming of the peace, and the flower of the nation was still abroad.

The French and British people encouraged by the patriotic cries of "Hang the Kaiser! and make the Germans pay" modestly followed by "the man who won the war"—were convinced that Germany was to be crushed, and it was not until afterwards that they discovered the enemy was the Liberal Party.

Saturday, December 28th, 1918.

I will quote from my diary what I wrote of the last day of the 1918 Elections.

* The Marquis of Salisbury.

"This fateful day for us opened by Henry, Gilbert Murray and Edward Grey going on a Deputation to convey to President Wilson the admiration they felt for his great Idea involved in the League of Nations.

"They started at 10.30 in the morning and when their interview was over, my husband and I motored through the decorated streets to attend the Guildhall, where a great company had been invited to see the Freedom of the City of London conferred upon the American President.

"We received a warm reception as we walked through the aisle of people up to the platform, and watched a ceremony with which we were all familiar.

"I sat next to Lord Cave, a kind and sensible man who had been strong enough when he was Home Secretary to oppose the meanest and most cowardly of all the Government stunts—turning men and women of German name out of this country, even when their sons had fought and died for us.

"In a short talk before the company was seated, he spoke with contempt of the methods of the Government, but in this he is not peculiar, as I never met a Tory who praised them. Every eye was upon President Wilson who was seated next to his

Woodrow Wilson

PRESIDENT WILSON

wife on a vast gold chair in the centre of the platform.

"I examined his lanky face, egotistical, slightly sensual mouth, and charming if too frequent smile, and noted the refinement of his brow and nostrils.

"He made an excellent though rather uninspiring speech, but disliking oratory of the rose and sky type and the long pauses of the highly prepared, I admired the President's penetrating calm. Each sentence was perfect in structure, and he might have sat down after any one of them. He spoke in a voice which everyone could hear, nor did he indulge in a quotable peroration.

"When I was praising this speech, in the interval between the Freedom of the City and the Mansion House luncheon, Mr. Davis * said to me:

" 'Yes, Mrs. Asquith, I agree; Wilson doesn't pull many feathers out of the Eagle's tail.'

"At this moment Henry came up and introduced me to the President, with whom I had a short but memorable conversation. I found him easy to talk to and much quicker than most of the famous Americans I have met.

"He told me that he had only got to express a

* Mr. Davis succeeded Mr. Page as American Ambassador.

sound opinion in a common-sense manner, and he was at once accused of being both unpractical and a dreamer; that obviously to prepare for another war was less practical than to prepare for Peace.

"When I was talking to him I wondered why he was so much disliked, and if he would not have had a larger following in his own country had he made a moral protest or pronouncement of some sort over Belgium in the early days of the war. The League of Nations, in which lie our best hopes, might have been less hated if it had been proposed by a man of indignation; whereas now it jars on America, enfuriates France, confuses Italy, and is suspected in England.

"People say: 'It's all very well, Wilson hasn't suffered in the War! *He* can dictate with his cool head and colder heart that a League of Nations, which includes Germany, will give us a Peace that we all want, or *ought* to want. But we'll never stand that! Germany must be made to suffer *all* and *more* than she has made others suffer. We must bring this home to her in *every* way, from generation to generation. We won't let America save Germany from the consequences of her de-

feat, or deprive us and the Allies of the consequences of our victory.'

"The mistaken part of this reasoning is that there is no 'Victory'; and the revengeful Peace for which men clamour means a return to old rivalries, and the subsequent preparation for War. As the Germans are the most orderly, scientific and hard-working of the European races they will ultimately suffer less than the Allies, and to what good purpose can be the perpetuation of Hate.

"I am only interested in the President inasmuch as he wants to rebuild a dying world instead of inflicting fresh wounds, and it matters little what instrument is used if it can fulfil this purpose.

"War should be made, if not inevitable by a League of Nations, at least as difficult as possible. The public in France and America seem to think this is Idealism, which in the minds of the commonplace is another word for ridiculous.

"It is sad to think that the men who fought the War are not likely to have a voice in the Peace, and those who stay at home are generally the Jingoes who want to make War a going concern.

"When Henry gave South Africa its Constitution, many of my friends, not only the Tories—

who, to quote Disraeli, have always been the stupid party—but men on our own side, said:

" 'Surely, surely, Margot! ! after having beaten the Boers you are not going to give them back their Freedom! Is your husband insane! Have all our lovers, sons and husbands died in vain?'

"According to Man, our dead always die in vain if we listen to Christ's teaching. But we don't; we listen to the Clergy, and are seldom disappointed with the provinciality of the Christ that they parody.

"President Wilson is trying to emulate the famous saying of the 18th century:

" 'Christianity has been tried and failed, the Religion of Christ remains to be tried.'

"The Republican Party in America stands for many things with which I am out of sympathy, but I cannot believe their dislike of the President is entirely political. From what I hear he is an Egotist; uncertain in his personal relations because he is not grateful; and a man who trusts few and those mostly his inferiors.

"This last is what really counts: men who like their inferiors seldom achieve high purposes. Nevertheless, President Wilson will go down to

History as having produced the only Great Idea in the War, and after listening to one of the finest speeches that I ever heard in my life at the Mansion House lunch, I said to myself:

" 'What is there that this man could not do, if his moral stature was comparable to his intellectual expression?'

"When he had finished speaking—knowing as I did that the Election returns might be out at any moment—I felt an apprehensive but burning curiosity to know what had happened. I was about to ask a waiter behind me if he could find out some of the figures, when I heard a man say:

" 'Herbert Samuel, McKinnon Wood, and Runciman are out.'

"We left the dining-room and made our way down to the crowded front door. People waiting for their motors were standing in groups discussing the Election returns.

" 'McKenna is beat; Montagu is in by over 9,000,' was whispered from mouth to mouth while the men thrust their arms into their coat sleeves changing their cigars from hand to hand in the process, and asking for their motors.

"The news spread; man after man of ours was out.

" 'Were we all *beaten?* . . . whom *could* I ask? . . . who would tell me?' Henry crushed up against me and said calmly:

" 'I see our footman.'

"Lady Cave pushed up and took my arm; I suppose I looked pale as she said:

" 'You are a brave woman, don't turn a hair! the thing *can't* last! it's a disgrace! a fraud, and a sham.'

"Among the crush in the large open doorway, waiting for his motor, I perceived Rufus Reading, looking snow white. Did he know, or did he not know if Henry was beaten? . . . perhaps they all knew.

"I was jammed up against my husband and had no idea what he had heard.

"I looked at him out of the corner of my eyelids; he was standing a little in front of me, but not a sign of any kind could be seen on his face. A man pushed up to us and said:

" 'Never you mind! the Elections have been fought on gigantic *lies;* no one could tell the truth,

but it will come out some day, and I hope they will all be severely punished!'

" 'Who are you?' I asked vaguely.

" 'I've written on the *Morning Post* for 15 years,' the man answered. 'I'm a hot Liberal and believe in Asquith. He's the only man who ought to be on the Peace Conference. You stick to it! *and make him stick,* for if he is not put on the Conference this country is lost. God bless you.'

"He slipped away—and after two kind squeezes from the Caves, and a lift of the hat from Rufus, we drove away in our motor, leaning back silent and exhausted.

"I saw as if in a trance the cheering crowds, eager faces, mounted police, and swaying people, while we shot down the streets with our minds set and stunned. Not one word did we say till we got near home; then Henry broke the silence:

" 'I only hope,' he said, 'that *I* have not got in; with all the others out this would be the last straw.'

" 'I expect we're all out,' I said: 'they are sure to have sent us the figures to Cavendish Square from the Whip's Office, aren't they? or do you suppose they've sent them to the Wharf?'

"'We're certain to get the figures,' Henry answered.

"The motor slowed down; we had arrived. I jumped out and ran through the open door in front of Henry; I found the odd man labelling our luggage piled up in the hall. Not a note or a message of any kind was to be seen.

"Henry went into his library, and I rang up 21 Abingdon Street on the telephone in my boudoir.

"'Not got in all the returns yet? . . . Yes? . . . All our Whips out? . . . *Yes?* . . . East Fife? *Yes?* . . . Asquith beat! *What??* BEAT?? Thank God, Thank God!!' I said and looking up I saw Maud Tree * standing behind me. Covering her face with her hands she burst into tears and said:

"'Oh! I can't bear it!! darling, darling Margot! . . . It's NOT true!!'

"Still holding the receiver, I said:

"'Yes? Go on—Yes . . . Yes . . .'

"Henry came in and Maud left the room.

"'I'm out, am I?' said he; 'ask by how much; tell them to give us the figures will you?'

* Lady Tree.

" 'Give me the East Fife figures,' I said, and taking a pencil wrote:

"Asquith 6994—Sprott 8996."

[*End of Diary Quotation*]

EPILOGUE

IT was difficult to believe that the war was over. The hearts of the nation and even the minds had got accustomed to it, and I never realized before how easy it is for men's minds to form bad habits. Few of us live up to the blessings we are accustomed to, and it is rare to preserve freshness of outlook in daily life.

The men who started by saying the war would be over in a few months—and these included nearly all our Admirals, Generals and business men—ended by believing it would go on for ever, and took it as an insult if you dared to suggest it had already lasted too long. You were a Pacifist or a pro-German if you did not share their enthusiastic desire to march into Berlin.

I observed the sensibilities of my acquaintance visibly thicken during the Great War, and even to-day you will meet men and women in France, Belgium and England who say that the Armistice came too soon.

One can never guess who the people will be that

think war wicked, that think it folly, or think it noble.

Women of no imagination but a certain fancy call it "glorious"; old men in Club windows say it is "inevitable"; and the young ones who stay at home boast that nothing but overwhelming Victory will ever satisfy their sense of honour. But to quote my dear friend, Mr. Maguire *:

"It is easy to be a bloodhound on the hearth."

People say the same thing about the inevitability of war as they said about the inevitability of duelling and with possibly as little reason. War is not glorious; it is futile and bestial. The training for it forces men to obey with wooden precision commands not only muddled and murderous, but which are against all their intelligence; nor can anyone believe to-day, that there is such a thing as Victory. I will go a step further and say with confidence, that whatever war may have done for the dead, it has not improved the living. The cranks are crankier, the gamblers more extravagant, the back-biters more spiteful, the rich more alarmed, the poor more restless, the clergy more confused, and the Government more corrupt.

* Mr. Rochfort Maguire.

With the signing of the Armistice all thoughts turned to the Peace Treaty and the infinite complications it was likely to present to the three principal figures concerned.

Mr. Lloyd George's proved genius for handling men had not given him the time or opportunity necessary for studying foreign affairs; nor had he ever been a great traveller. The French language is at all times difficult for an Englishman, and International Law was not the strong point either of the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, Mr. Wilson, or Monsieur Clemenceau. Reading or writing letters, the latter had often said to me, was an occupation that bored him. Geographical frontiers want either knowledge or study, and no American President, however eloquent, is qualified by his position to know much about European affairs. Nor was the vital problem of Finance a subject that either one or other of the three professed to know anything at all about.

When it was rumoured that neither our Foreign Office, War Office, nor Admiralty was to be represented at Versailles, we were interested to guess who the personnel would be; and when it was known that no one versed in International Law or

Finance had been approached, men of every Party and opinion besieged our house begging my husband to go to Paris. They said he must overlook all personal feeling and in such an emergency offer his services to his country: that, having been Chancellor of the Exchequer, with an unrivalled knowledge of Law, and leader of one of the great political Parties, he had every right to be there as his counsel would prove invaluable in drawing up the Treaty of Peace.

All sorts of stories were current. Some said that for reasons of a private character, Mr. Asquith refused to discuss politics with Mr. Lloyd George, and that at such a moment to think of oneself showed a pettiness inconceivable in a man of his quality.

These stories spread to the House of Commons and my husband told me that it had been repeated to him—with what accuracy he did not know—that Mr. Lloyd George had said that, in the event of any misfortune happening, Mr. Asquith would be largely responsible, as he had never taken the trouble to talk to him about the present situation.

On hearing this, my husband spoke to one of the Prime Minister's many henchmen and said he was

ready and willing, should Mr. Lloyd George desire it, to speak to him at any time; and shortly after this—before the General Election of December, 1918—Henry was asked to go to the Prime Minister's room in the House of Commons.

Upon his return he told me what had occurred. He had been received with a friendliness that amounted to enthusiasm and asked where he stood. Mr. Lloyd George then said,

"I understand you don't wish to take a post under the Government."

To which my husband answered that that was so; and added that the only service he thought he could render the Government, would be if he were to go to Versailles, as from what he knew both of President Wilson and M. Clemenceau he was pretty sure they knew little of International Law or Finance, and that these two problems would be found all important in view of fixing future Frontiers and the havoc the war was likely to create in all the Foreign Exchanges.

At this Mr. Lloyd George looked a little confused. He was walking up and down the room, and in knocking up against a chair, a pile of loose books were thrown upon the ground. Hastily

looking at his watch and stooping down to pick up the books, he said he would consider my husband's proposal. Nothing more was said; the interview was over and my husband never heard another word upon the matter.

If the men who had fought the war had made the Peace, the name by which they were christened might have been appropriate; but as it turned out, a more fantastic misnomer for President Wilson and the representatives of the other Allies could hardly have been conceived than the "Big Four."

Victory puts a greater strain on the behaviour of Nations and individuals than Failure; and you can take the measure of both, according to the way in which they bear it.

No British Prime Minister ever went abroad accompanied by wiser advisers than Mr. Lloyd George when he left England to make the Peace. He took, among others, a young man of genius in Mr. Maynard Keynes, every word of whose writing has come true. But the minds were loose, the ears deaf, and the heads swollen of those to whom he was talking, and the worst instead of the best qualities were developed at Versailles, and seen as clearly as flags flown from ships.

If any of the "Big Four" had had a vestige of greatness the world would not have witnessed the exhibition of Greed, Grab and Intrigue that reduced the Peace Conference to a Thieves' Kitchen. They might have taken for the sermon that they preached, the text out of Isaiah:

"Yea they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that can never understand; they all look to their own way, everyone for his gain from his quarter." *

Two of the Nations that signed the Peace should hesitate before criticising France either for her policy at Versailles, or for her prejudices to-day.

America came into the war late and suffered the least. Great Britain is geographically so placed as to be in no danger from Germany (unless aeroplanes make much greater strides than they have yet done), and after her demands upon the enemy it would have been fatal for the prestige of any French Government to have asked for less. Neither of these countries can realize the nameless horrors, the losses in men, money, and material from which the French suffered by having the ag-

* Isaiah 56, v. 11.

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gressor on their soil; aggravated as they were by the bitter memories of 1870.

Their military preparations before 1914 were not of such an alarming character as to make a single German believe that their intention was to attack them; and the unnecessary brutalities of the enemy outside the exigencies of war—the deliberate laying waste of orchards, factories and farms, after they knew that they were defeated—will be hard for Frenchmen ever to forgive. It is in consequence of these brutalities that the natural but futile desire to profit at the enemy's expense is pursuing the nations of the world to-day.

The Coupon claptrap in our khaki election of "Hang the Kaiser!" and "make the Germans pay the whole cost of the war," was quite as likely to deceive France as England. And when one remembers the effect it produced upon our own people, it is obvious that the French were more than justified in believing that their unexcitable Ally meant business; and being roused at last to a proper sense of their misfortunes was prepared to back them to the last man in the Ruhr, and on the Rhine.

I have spoken to many thoughtful men, and am

convinced that the Confidence Trick in the General Election of 1918 was played with even greater success upon the French than upon the British public, and you have only to look at the state of things in this country to see the results not only of the Election promises but of the mischievous decisions taken in consequence of them at a Treaty of Peace which everyone to-day is clamouring to change.

The Kaiser is not hanged; the German pockets have not been searched; the "land fit for heroes to live in" threatens to deport men by emigration not in thousands, but in hundreds of thousands; millions of unemployed tramp the streets; the "Safeguarding of Industries Act"—which could be more accurately called, "For the Prevention of the recovery of foreign Exchanges"—has not only increased the price of necessary articles, but hurts Lancashire and hampers scientific research; and the Coalition Candidates at every by-election vie with each other in disclaiming all connection with the Government.

It was the duty of the "Big Four" to help France instead of tempting her; to check the ambitions of

little nations instead of inflaming them; and above everything else, to make Peace.

The men who criticise Liberals for being lovers of Peace are called Loyalists, and believe in force. If their counsel had prevailed in the past we should have lost South Africa; in listening to them we see what Reprisals have made of Ireland, and if we are not careful we shall lose our good name all the world over.

Were these critics teachable, they would know that if you are sufficiently prepared for war you will certainly get it; and if they doubt the truth of this, they will find no better object lesson than in the failure of a people like the Germans, who after long and scientific preparation were equipped in 1914 not only to conquer France, but the larger part of Europe.

No Minister could remain in Office in this country if he suggested that outside our Navy we should keep an Army large enough to fight a foreign power, while ensuring sufficient trade to pay for both.

It was the duty of the "Big Four" to impress upon the world after such a catastrophe, that the

only means by which we—or any other nation—could be saved, was by the co-operation of the victors and the vanquished alike, and to guide them into the paths of Peace.

The Conference darkened the waters like the cuttle fish; and the British people, led by their Prime Minister, acquiesced in the decisions of Versailles with less excuse than any of the other countries and are blushing for it now.

Mr. Spender writes in a fine leading article:

"After three years of Peace it is brought home to practical men that nearly everything the Allies have attempted to do to their late enemies has been hurtful to themselves. Nothing less than a complete revision undertaken in a new spirit will bury old feuds and work for co-operation against dangers which threaten all Europe."

The spirit of war is the spirit of conquest or revenge, and both war and the preparation for it blur Vision as weeds choke growth. It is not in the interests of the enemy, but in the interests of France, of England, and of Europe that the Peace is universally damned to-day.

Ever since the birth of Christ crowds clamour for the wrong person. If we had been nobly led

into a clean Peace—to quote my husband—the American people might have backed the League of Nations; but we joined in the clamour for Barabbas. The League was difficult to shout, and wanted both Love and Faith to understand. The President, dazed by the deftness of the Paris Treaty, and diverted by the shouts of the crowd, lost sight of the silent Christ. He paused to distinguish the names, and while he was listening his health broke, and he was repudiated by his own people.

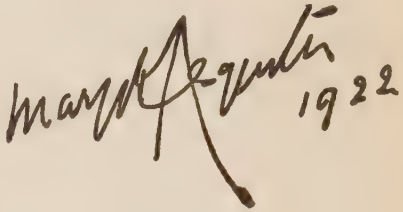
. . . . . .

If Germany is not sufficiently punished for having equipped a vast army for an unprovoked war, the mills of God grind exceeding slow. It was pride in their progress that hardened the hearts and turned the heads of our enemy. Let the Allies be careful lest love of themselves, or fear of the future, does not turn theirs also.

There is only one antidote to vanity after Victory, and that is to remember God.

"In the days when the keepers of the house shall tremble and the strong men shall bow themselves . . . when they shall be afraid of that which is

High, and fears shall be in the way. . . . For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil."



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